

PRESENT SCENARIO OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- SOME ISSUES

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Fortunately, women studies are gaining more and more importance and their efforts and contribution for the development of the family and nation are drawing attention in recognition to their efforts, ability and efficiency in recent times. Therefore, women are no longer confined to the four walls of home. The sheer economic need and the gradual spread of education were responsible for the change. Reddy opined that “although women constitute 50 per cent of India’s population, perform two-thirds of the work and produce 50 per cent of the food commodities consumed by the country, they earn only one third of the remuneration and 10 per cent of the property or wealth of the country”¹

Gender pay gap in India refers to the difference in earnings between women and men in the paid employment and labor market². For the year 2013, the gender pay gap in India was estimated to be 24.81 per cent³. A report by the [World Economic Forum](#) highlights that in the corporate sector in India, a woman is paid only one-third of what a man in the

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¹ Reddy, 1994: Women and Rural development – A study of DWCRA in Chaddaphah District, Kurukshetra, Volume –XLII, No: 12, Sept.

² Dutta, Puja (2005). "Accounting for Wage Inequality in India" (PDF). The Indian Journal of Labour Economics.

³ Wage Indicator Foundation, Gender Pay Gap in the Formal Sector: 2006 - 2013 Wage Indicator Data Report (September 2013) Preliminary Evidences from Paycheck India Data.

same position is paid⁴. Further, while analyzing the level of female participation in the economy, this report slots India as one of the bottom 10 countries on its list. Thus, in addition to unequal pay, there is also unequal representation, because while women constitute almost half the Indian population (about 48 per cent of the total), their representation in the work force amounts to only about one-fourth of the total⁵.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan pointed out that women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making. Women must have a say in decision-making and to shape their lives. The year 1975 was declared as International Women's year by the UNO. It was a landmark in the process of empowering women globally⁶. In 1979, the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was adopted at the United Nations. Even though the Indian Constitution granted equal status for women, our culture had discriminated women on the basis of gender.

Empowerment of women is important in a developing country like India why because the benefits will not only felt by the women themselves, but also by their households and in turn their nation. Therefore, the Government of India realizing the need of empowerment of women and announced a National Policy on Empowerment of women in 1996 and declared 'the year 2001 as the year of Women Empowerment'.

Therefore, in the present paper an attempt is made to explain the concepts of 'Empowerment' and 'Women Empowerment', by considering different dimensions and also approaches to attain women empowerment. In order to measure the status of women and improvement attained after adopting women oriented measures in the country this study observed the changes taken place in select indicators of women empowerment in 15 major States in general and Andhra Pradesh in Particular.

⁴Saadia Zahidi, Herminia Ibarra (2010), "The Corporate Gender Gap Report, 2010" (PDF). World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁵ Government of India , "Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) Planning Commission ".
<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/11thf.htm>

⁶ UNDP report, 1995, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Empowerment is a positive and dynamic concept. It requires practical knowledge, solid information real competence, concrete skills, material resources, genuine opportunities and tangible results. The term “empowerment” has been overused since four decades. Empowerment has been defined many ways. It is used as a synonym for participation, for speaking out or for meeting some basic needs.

Empowerment is defined as "the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives"⁷. It includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). Women's empowerment may well mean that the powerful within households' communities and traditional political spaces have to learn to share power and control over decision-making and resources. Women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment - economic, educational, social and political-would hasten the pace of social development. Investing in women's 'capabilities' and empowering them to achieve their 'choices' and 'opportunities' is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development⁸.

Keller says that it is a process where by increase their self reliance, to assert their independent rights to make choice and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own sub-ordination⁹. Empowerment is a process of gaining understanding of and control over the political forces around one as a means of improving one's standing in society. (Kindervatter, 1979).

Empowerment can be used for social mobilization, changing women's state of mind and gaining access to the basis of social power (Friedmann, 1992). Empowerment begins when women “change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness, when they recognize the systematic forces that oppress them and when they act to change the

⁷ Gita Sen and Srilatha Batliwala, 2000: "Empowering Women for Reproductive Rights", in Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes- Moving Beyond Cairo, in Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen Ed., Oxford University Press.

⁸ B.K.Pattanaik (2000): Women Welfare and Social Development, Yojana, Nov. 2000.

⁹ Indira.M.2000: 'Women in Micro Enterprise: A Study of Mysore and Dharwad Districts,' Unpublished Report of Indo-Dutch Project Management Society, Bangalore.

conditions of their lives (Morgen and Bookman, 1988, p.4). Stronquist further clarifies that this process of changing the distribution of power should focus on “interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society”. (Stronquist, 1995, p.13).

According to Vanessa Griffen (1987) empowerment means addition to women’s power and power means:

1. Having control, organizing further control.
2. Having a say and being listened to.
3. Being able to define and create from a women’s perspective.
4. Being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society
5. Being organized and respected as equal citizens and human being with a contribution to make.

Empowerment may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology (Batliwala, 1995). Empowerment is a process aims at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantage section in a given context.

Dimensions of Empowerment:

Three dimensions are considered regarding women empowerment (Ranjani et. al 2002). They are ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power within’. The first dimension includes power to survive, control over their labour and access to family labour, access to and control over resources, freedom to move and interact, access to leadership positions, control over body. The second one includes collective interventions in the institutions of family, community market organization and the state including statutory local bodies. The third one includes the ability of women to challenge gender related attitudes and social norms in their own personal lives.

Empowerment Approaches:

Following three approaches both by Government and Non-Government organizations can attain women Empowerment generally. They are Integrated Development Approach, the

Economic Empowerment Approach and the Conscious-raising Approach. The basic philosophy behind the Integrated Development Approach is that women's development is the key to the advancement of family and community. Under this approach interventions to reduce poverty, meeting basic minimum needs reducing gender discriminations etc. are implemented. The Economic Empowerment Approach attributes women's subordination to lack of economic power. This approach aims at empowering women by improving control over material resources and strengthening women's economic activity. The basis of the Conscious – raising approach is that unless women realize the existence of gender inequity and oppression, any amount of effort cannot empower women. This makes women to locate the causes of subordination and tackle them through women's collective participation.

Measure of Empowerment:

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) introduced in the Human Development Report 1995 concentrates on participation, measuring gender inequality in key areas of economic and political participation and decision-making¹⁰. The GEM measures the relative empowerment of men and women in economic and political spheres of activity. The low values of GEM indicate that there is a wide disparity in empowerment of men and women and economic and political opportunities need to be expanded for women to achieve empowerment. But it is also noticed in the report that the creation of opportunities for women does not depend on a country's income level or economic growth¹¹.

Status of Women in India:

Most of the Indian women belong to the traditional and religiously orthodox families. They are in languid state in a patriarchal society and deprived of mobility and social status. Therefore when India won independence while framing the Constitution, the leaders of the country enshrined the principle of gender equality in the Preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles, they empowered state to

¹⁰ UNDP: Human Development Report, 1996, P.34.

¹¹ Ibid., P.35.

adopt measures in favour of women. There has been a marked shift, from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79), in the women related issues from welfare to development. The empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. In 1992 the National Commission for women was set up to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) provided reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women and thus laid strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at the local bodies¹². The Eighth Five Year Plan intends at enabling women to function as equal partners and participants in development by extending the services both qualitatively and quantitatively. The Ninth Five Year Plan intends to empowering women as the agents of social change and development. Moreover, National policy for Empowerment of women was formulated and set up a National Resource Centre for women¹³. These are all steps taken by the Department of women and Child Development at the National level.

The Eleventh five year plan acknowledges women's agencies and tries to ensure that their needs, rights and contributions are reflected in every section of the plan document. For the first time in the history of Indian planning there is an attempt to move beyond empowerment and recognize women as an agent of sustained socio-economic growth and change.

According to the UNDP's latest Human Development Report (2014), India ranks 135 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) and 127 out of 152 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The GII is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. This puts India in the bottom 25 percent of all countries on the HDI and even lower—in the bottom 20 percent on the GII. Furthermore, the child sex ratio—the number of girls to boys at birth—is relatively low

¹² Government of India (2001): Empowerment of Women and National Policy - 2001, Report of Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Department, New Delhi.

¹³ B.K.Pattanaik (2000): Women Welfare and Social Development, Yojana, Nov. 2000.

in the world, and moreover declined from 927 girls per 1000 boys in 2001 to 918 girls for every 1000 boys in 2011.

Programmes for Women Development:

Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty given the harsh realities of intra household and social discrimination, macro economic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address needs and problems of such women. To increase the income generating power of the families below the poverty line is the main objective of Integrated Rural Development Programmes. 30 per cent of women should be beneficiaries in these programmes. The Programmes initiated to uplift the status of women are - Indira Mahila Yojana, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, STEP, NORAD Programme, ARVIND, DWCRA, and TRYSEM etc. The Nationalised banks have also given special attention for the development of the women entrepreneur in recent years. This is really an encouraging and inducing step as it was neglected earlier.

Overall development and empowerment can be evaluated only when seen in totality. Thus it is essential to look at the various indicators as sex ratio, health, life expectancy, literacy, employment, decision-making power etc. Census 2011 shows significant improvement in the literacy rate from 64.84 per cent in 2001 to 74.04 per cent in 2011 but the jump is more in female literacy rate, which increased from 53.67 per cent in 2001 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Sex Ratio too has increased in the case of female from 933 to 943 in 2011. The increase in female ratio means decline in infant as well as maternal mortality rate. This improvement in Census Report 2011 has been reflected both at the urban and rural levels. In rural areas accordingly has more improvement in terms of literacy, political participation, decision-making and health ratio than in the urban areas.

Table-1 presents the comparative picture of some indicators of women empowerment among 15 major States of India. The select indicators are sex ratio, female work participation rate, female literacy rate, female life expectancy and female infant mortality rate.

Table -1 reveals that Karnataka and Tamil Nadu States recorded above National average in all indicators of women empowerment in this study. All other States in one or the other indicators lagging behind the National average. For instance, in the State of Kerala and West Bengal except in female work participation rate all other indicators recorded above National average. In the States of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh recorded below the national average in sex ratio. In some States viz. Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, and West Bengal one indicator among selected indicators of women empowerment are below the National average. In rest of the selected States two or more than two indicators falling behind the National average. This means on the whole there is improvement in some indicators of women empowerment and some indicators are lagging behind. Though there is overall development and empowerment recorded at National level it is not so in all States.

The educational backwardness of the Indian women has always been highlighted as a major obstacle in economic development. Therefore, it is pertinent to observe changes in female literacy rate among 15 major States and level of enrolment of girls in Andhra Pradesh (Table 2 & 3).

It is observed that at the National Level still only 65.46 per cent of the female population attained education. Among different States Rajasthan and Bihar recorded very low levels to the extent of 52.7 per cent and 53.3 per cent respectively. Kerala attained highest literacy rate to the extent of 92.00 per cent followed by Maharashtra to the per cent of 75.5. In all other States literacy rate ranged between above 59 per cent and below 74 per cent

The increasing female work participation rate over a period indicates that more number of the female was brought into the work force. But it remained almost similar in 2001 and 2011, signifying the need to give special attention for female employment to bring more and more women into work force. Andhra Pradesh occupies the first place among the 15 major States in respect of female work force and participation rate. This may be due to

the developmental programs implemented by the Government of Andhra Pradesh for women.

The Andhra Pradesh Government also announced its Draft Strategy Paper on Women Empowerment in January 2001¹⁴. The main thrust of the policy is convergent of all activities pertaining to women in order to improve education, health, nutrition and overall development of the social and economic indicators for women and children in the State.

The important objectives of Women Empowerment policy are:

- Increase gender sensitization.
- Address gender inequalities in education and employment.
- Increase gender sensitivity to health, welfare and economic programmes.
- Prevent atrocities against women.

Table –2 presents some indicators of women status in Andhra Pradesh. It may be observed from the Table that there is a remarkable change in the female literacy rate over the period of time. It was 15.75 per cent in 1971, which rose to 51.52 per cent in 2001 and finally 59.7 per cent in 2011. But, according to the 2011 census figures, the rank of Andhra Pradesh among other major States was 12, indicating that high efforts for female literacy were made in other states, keeping them far ahead from Andhra Pradesh (Table-1).

For the year 2013-2014, the enrolment ratio of girl child in Class I -V is 98.98 and for Class VI -VII is 80.73. The drop out ratio of the girl child for Class I - V is 12.60, for Class 1-VII is 25.12 and for Class I - X is 32.47¹⁵. This shows that more emphasis should be given to educational aspects of girls. Table -3 provides the enrolment of girl child by level of education in Andhra Pradesh from 2001-2002 to 2013-14.

¹⁴ Government of Andhra Pradesh (2001): Explanatory Memorandum, Department of Planning, Hyderabad.

¹⁵ Government of Andhra Pradesh (2013-14): Educational Statistics (Andhra Pradesh 13 Districts), Commissioner and Director of School Education, Hyderabad, State Project Director, Rajiv Vidya Mission (SSA), Andhra Pradesh.

IV Conclusion:

According to the 2011 Census an improvement has been reflected in all indicators of female empowerment. Though there is improvement in the female literacy rate from 2001 to 2011, majority of women in rural sector still remain uneducated especially in Bihar and Rajasthan. Daughters are definitely more educated today than mothers. The adult education and distance education have been successful with the efforts of NGOs, but still there is lack of training schools for rural females. Traditional attitudes continue to dominate and what is needed most is the change of mind set. While establishment of better educational system, opening more schools, training institutes and compulsory education till the age of at least 14 years, better quality of life for female is expected. Establishment of educational institutions to Educate, Enlighten, Elevate and Empower women students especially in rural areas is essential.

TABLE -1

Comparative Statistics of Women Empowerment -15 Major States

State/ Indicator s	Sex Ratio 2011	Rank	Female Work participat ion Rate 2011	Rank	Female Literac y Rate 2011	Rank	Female Life Expectan cy at Birth (2009- 13)	Rank	Infan t mort ality Rate Fema le (201 3)	Rank
Andhra Pradesh	993	3	36.2	1	59.7	12	70.4	9	40	8
Assam	958	6	22.5	9	67.3	8	65.1	15	55	2
Bihar	918	12	19.1	10	53.3	14	68.0	11	43	6
Gujarat	919	11	23.4	8	70.7	6	70.5	8	37	9
Haryana	879	15	17.7	13	66.8	9	70.9	6	42	7
Karnatak a	973	5	31.9	4	68.1	7	70.8	7	32	11
Kerala	1084	1	18.2	11	92.0	1	77.8	1	13	15
Madhya Pradesh	931	8	32.6	3	60.0	11	65.5	13	55	1
Maharas htra	929	9	31.1	6	75.5	2	73.4	3	25	13

Orissa	979	4	27.2	7	64.4	10	65.9	13	52	4
Punjab	895	14	13.9	15	71.3	4	73.4	12	27	12
Rajasthan	928	10	35.1	2	52.7	15	70.0	10	49	5
Tamil Nadu	996	2	31.8	5	73.9	3	72.3	4	21	14
Uttara Pradesh	912	13	16.7	14	59.3	13	65.2	14	52	4
West Bengal	950	7	18.1	12	71.2	5	71.6	5	33	10
India	943		25.5		65.46		69.3		42	

Source: 1. Indian Economic Survey, 2014-15, Government of India.

2. Statistical Profile on Women Labour, 2012-13, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.

Table -2

Women Status indicators in Andhra Pradesh

Year	Female Population	Percentage of female population	Decadal Growth rate	No. of Female workers (Main + marginal)	Work participation Rate	Literacy Rate
1971	21494045	49.41	20.61	5193514	24.16	15.75
1981	26440751	49.38	23.01	8868922	33.54	20.39
1991	32783427	49.29	23.99	1252643	34.32	32.72
2001	37620737	49.43	14.76	13139307	34.93	51.52
2011	42138631	49.82	12.01	15237311	36.2	59.7

Source: Statistical Profile on Women Labour, 2012-13, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.

Table-3**Enrolment of Girls by Level of Education in Andhra Pradesh –
2001-02 to 2013-14**

Year	Pre-Primary	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
2001-02	242730 (3.74)	4244203 (65.44)	1038797 (16.02)	957914 (14.77)	2396 (0.04)
2002-03	246530 (3.70)	4209924 (63.18)	1152287 (17.29)	1051849 (15.79)	2404 (0.04)
2003-04	209991 (3.23)	3931511 (60.50)	1179296 (18.15)	1175029 (18.08)	2583 (0.04)
2004-05	133889 (2.07)	3797762 (58.69)	1226599 (18.96)	1309430 (20.24)	3254 (0.05)
2005-06	211270 (3.23)	3649224 (55.85)	1270111 (19.44)	1400439 (21.43)	3336 (0.05)
2006-07	320651 (4.78)	3626448 (54.02)	1290151 (19.22)	1472556 (21.94)	3113 (0.05)
2007-08	307631 (4.62)	3533217 (53.07)	1272608 (19.12)	1540712 (23.14)	3130 (0.05)
2008-09	317214 (4.75)	3508487 (52.56)	1241020 (18.59)	1602275 (24.00)	5888 (0.09)
2009-10	184546 (2.82)	3510697 (53.66)	1214256 (18.56)	1621053 (24.78)	11669 (0.18)
2010-11	171489 (2.63)	3491576 (53.54)	1244263 (19.08)	1601583 (24.56)	12414 (0.19)
2011-12	180491 (2.75)	3463874 (52.80)	1293395 (19.72)	1608759 (24.52)	13867 (0.21)
2012-13	175440 (2.69)	3401911 (52.21)	1279493 (19.64)	1638051 (25.14)	20651 (0.32)
2013-14	154246 (2.34)	3425245 (51.96)	1274810 (19.34)	1705678 (25.88)	31513 (0.48)

Source: Educational Statistics (Andhra Pradesh 13 Districts), 2013-14, Commissioner and Director of School Education, Hyderabad, State Project Director, Rajiv Vidya Mission (SSA), Andhra Pradesh.

Note: Figures in Brackets are percentages to total enrollment of students.