



International Journal Of Scientific And University Research Publication

ISSN No **1312-342(ON)**

Listed & Index with
ISSN Directory, Paris



Multi-Subject Journal



THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a critical development concern around the world, especially in developing nations. The term 'empowerment' denotes the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and transform those into desired actions and outcomes. Women empowerment can be treated as a process by which women can enjoy greater control over material and intellectual resources that will enable themselves to have greater autonomy over household decision-making and economic resources. It has been widely recognized that development goals cannot be realized unless gender inequalities are removed and women are empowered to choose and decide about their own welfare, the welfare of their families, and the communities in which they reside. Women's empowerment is very crucial for safe guarding not only their personal and household welfare, but also the well-being of the entire society as women are recognized to be the primary guardians responsible for altering the quality and quantity of human resources available in a country and to promote sustainable development in the coming generations (UNFPA, 2005). This paper uses impact of religion on women empowerment through education, work participation and political representation as potential sources of empowerment, while their household decision making and freedom of movement outside the home.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

Objectives –

To evaluate the impact of religion on gender equality and women empowerment. Data source –primary and secondary source. The study is depending on primary and secondary data.

Women constitute about half the population of India. But, no efforts were made to elevate the status of women till independence. It was only after we achieved freedom that efforts were made to remove their social and economic disabilities by providing those opportunities to develop and legal protection. As a result women in India are getting gainful employment outside the home. It will be agreed that the levels of economic equality and independence are the true indicators to determine the status of women. Employment of women, therefore, is a necessary corollary to achieve gender equality and gender justice. The constitution of India grants equality to women and the Government of India has brought out specific legislations to protect and safeguard their rights and interests. The Government of India has further proposed to strengthen the process of empowerment of women in the 10th Five – Year Plan. As at present, millions of women are engaged for employment in the agriculture, industry and services. They are found in both organized and unorganized sectors of Indian economy. India's society is characterized by caste and religious diversity. Each has a deep-seated historical presence in the social organization and daily lives of the country's citizens. The caste system, one of the most enduring institutions in India with roots that extend as far back as 3,500 years ago, has had a stronghold over Hindu culture. It is comprised of hierarchical social categories (Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and Dalits, each having its own set of sub-castes) that have operated as social, economic, and political barriers not only between groups, but also to civil equality. Caste is hereditary, heavily connected to occupation and assumptions about cleanliness and purity, and intercaste marriage is largely socially unacceptable. Accordingly, there is much social distance between upper and lower castes. Lower castes are often relegated to menial and manual labor and jobs associated with pollution and impurity. Additionally, lower caste women in particular experience a level of gender discrimination and poverty that often keeps them poor, ultimately serving as an additional barrier to class mobility (Jain, 2005; Mitra, 2007; Parashar, 2008; Singh, 2005). Though India is majority-Hindu, it is home to citizens who practice Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, and many other religions. Accompanying this diversity has been a long history of religious conflict and turmoil, most predominantly between Hindus and Muslims. While there have been social and legislative pushes encouraging religious tolerance, there is a growing scholarship that acknowledges and examines the nuances of religious-based gender

inequality (Jain, 2005; MacKinnon, 2006; Mitra, 2007; Parashar, 2008). Despite the historical embeddedness of caste and gender inequality and religious unrest, India's post 1947 independence leaders promised its diverse constituents citizenship rights that extended across caste, gender, and religion (Newbiggin, 2011; Varma, 2009). Distinct from its previous British rule, India's constitutional law guaranteed citizens the right to religious freedom and the practice of one's own culture, and prohibited gender- and caste-based discrimination (Newbiggin, 2011; Varma, 2009; Williams, 2011). Scholars suggest, however, that in ensuring freedom of religion, the constitution also effectively affirmed gender inequality through patriarchal religious and cultural practices, and religious personal law (Mukhopadhyay, 2003; Parashar, 2008; Sundar, 2011; Williams, 2011). The last six and half decades, Women in India have made significant advances, entering every field of education and taking on the challenges of various professions. However, despite the constitutional provisions and women-specific legislative measures which provide various opportunities for enhancing their socio-economic and cultural status, masses of the women still remained disempowered due to gender-role discrimination, social stereotypes, and stigma. The low status of women has been a matter of concern for many years and the Government of India has implemented various policies and programmes to improve their status. There are also significant differences in women-specific status across regions, caste, class, communities, and religions. Religion as a particular system of faith and worship based on belief in the existence of a god or gods. Religion dictates morality, ethics, religion laws and accepted lifestyles almost all the participants agreed that religion was very important in their lives in the sense that it guides their daily lives. They also agreed that religion shape their moral values, behavior and practices. As believers, the majority of participants asserted that they believed in a world where God reigns and this world is where justice, peace and freedom prevail. Religion is a powerful institution within society that shape the way people think, respond to and perceive issues. In line with this, the researcher wanted to find out from the participants to what extent their religious beliefs influenced the way they perceive gender equality and women empowerment. Three themes emerged from the discussion: role of religion; role of leaders in promoting gender equality and women empowerment and consistency between religious teachings and legal and policy framework on gender. Socio-cultural family norms have been observed to have a robust impact on educational attainment because they tend to maintain male-centric, pro-marriage, pro-natalist values and negatively impact the role of females outside the normative sphere.

CONCLUSION

The status of women in society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious texts and the cultural and institutional set-up of religious communities. The role of religion is, obviously, complex and it varies across time and space. We accept the premise that everyone benefits from gender equality. We consider gender equality and the emancipation of women as important factors for the economic, social, and democratic progress of the world's regions and for the development of human society. This process is influenced by institutional norms, as well as culture and tradition, which are both largely determined by religion. As the relationship between religion and culture is reciprocal, religious systems are locked in a circle of mutual influence with social norms and patterns of social organization. It is apparent that the study of the status of women in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole.

Plan

Objectives

Conclusion

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