



The Women Empowerment in India and Nursing Profession as an Emerging Identity of Women's Era

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***Abstract:** The paper is an effort to discuss some important aspects of women's empowerment in India and how the nursing profession is the flag bearer of women's journey to financial independence. In the past few decades' women are the center of policies globally women. Women are more vocal than ever before about their equal share in social security, gender equity, and health. Women empowerment, in other words, is a way of conquering obstacles and increasing the ability to achieve acceptance and take an active part in decision-making related to her and their families. The lack of educational opportunities for women puts them behind in equal sharing of power and decision makes autonomy. Nursing is the choice of profession for women in India and the majority of nursing professionals are women in India and have a wider acceptance as a reputed profession in Indian society*

***Keywords:** Women, Empowerment, Nurses, India, Employment, Female, Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are the chief architect of the family and constituted the key role in the arch of society through their sacrifices and family first commitment. No wonder for centuries women's role is supposed to be bound within the four walls of the house with household responsibilities as such taking care of family members and saying "Yes" to everything.

India is amongst the oldest civilizations and the second-largest democracy in the world. Articles 14 to 16 of the Indian constitution guarantee impartial treatment to both male and female nationals. Furthermore, constitution article 15 bars the government to discriminate against their citizens on basis of gender. Additionally, article 15 (3) gives the right to the state to make provisions to safeguard the rights of women.¹

Empowerment is a term widely used in the context of development, independence, autonomy, and obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people. Women empowerment is an active, multi-sectoral process that should enable women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. In other words, it is a way of conquering obstacles and



increasing their ability to achieve acceptance and take an active part in decision-making related to her and their families.²

The women empowerment journey in India is a roller coaster ride since independence and has been facing several obstacles. Remarkably Indian women received universal suffrage from day one of Independence in the year 1947 a quite before the developed nation was given equal power to participate in electoral politics.

In true terms, the story of women's empowerment started when India become the second country in modern history to elect women prime minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, in 1966. Since then India has witnessed many women Chief Ministers, cabinet ministers, the president of India, and many other women leading politicians.³

In the past seven decades of independence, India has been struggling with a lower level of literacy, social inequality, poverty, and limited employment. The previous and present governments have tried sufficiently to tackle these issues. Especially in the past two decades the government at either center of the state has introduced several programs and schemes and made various legal provisions by amendments in the constitution to protect the rights of women.²

The Narendra Modi lead central government promotes gender equality, through its flagship scheme *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* to assure health, safety, and provision of compulsory education. Women empowerment is incomplete until reaches rural areas of the country, Indian parliament passed the historical 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution in 1992 to guarantee women one-third of seats in the Panchayat. At present, there is a total of around 8, 38, 244 (40.48%) gram panchayat members who are women out of a total of 20, 56, 882 laces Gaon panchayat members.⁴ Despite all these efforts and actions, women in India still lag behind men. Moreover, the unbridled population growth has negated whatever has been achieved.

Empowering Women by Education

Education is playing a foremost role in human development as the other two important elements of health and finance are depending on education. The women's literacy rate is an essential tool to assess the social transformation of women in any country.¹

After decades of implementing literacy programs in India underinvestment in women's education is a concern and in each sense, women remain grossly under-represented. The literacy rate in 2011 reported an overall 74.04 percent national literacy rate. Whereas 82.14 for males and 65.46 for females showed notable gaps between policy implementation and actual practice on the ground.⁵ Equal access to education for women is one of the important sources of empowerment and can be understood by the gender gap in literacy between men and women. A notable portion of the middle school girl nearly 40% in the age group of 15-18 years is skipping school due to poverty and the non-availability of schools near their home.⁶

The autonomy in the decision-making power of women in family and society is one of the vital indicators of women's liberation journey. Higher education for women increases the possibilities of getting employment and financial stability.

Gender equality and women empowerment in India

Anciently the stature of the woman in Indian culture is positioned among the most honored. There is evidence from the Vedic age showing equal rights for women in education, marriage, or remaining unmarried to the pursuit of knowledge and self-realization. The basis



of gender equality is cherished in the soul of our constitution and finds a place in the national preamble proudly. Contrary to the common ideology that progress is gender-neutral, the statistics show a different picture as women are playing a secondary role and lag behind men in receiving equal opportunities. All responsibility for maintaining work-family balance is on women's shoulders due to the age-old mindset of considering women primarily responsible for family affairs. Gender disproportion is so deeply rooted in Indian culture that it has become normalized.

Even though the workplace has never been equal for men and women in any civilization. Moreover commonly the top positions in major organizations are being covered by male counterparts no matter if co-employees or women are equally or more eligible and capable of shouldering the responsibilities.⁷

India is ranked top amongst the countries having the worst level of sex discrimination since birth. As per the 2011 census, India has 918 girls for a 1000-boy ratio. Sadly many Indian states have shown an unbalanced gender ratio with the female population comparably less than males. The desire of having a son over a female child mismatches the gender ratio, especially in the northern area of the nation. The basic cause of such attitude remains in the age-old belief that a male child inherits the clan and is probably the reason behind India's embarrassing 112th rank among 153 countries in the annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2020 even below countries like Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.⁸

The latest amendments in already existing law applaud efforts by the government initiated to advance gender equality and the situation is improving in India. Now girls are having better autonomy in marriage decisions and much focus on careers and higher education. The recent result of the Indian civil services (UPSC exam) shows hope to many as the top 3 position in rank achieved by girls.

Economic Empowerment of Women:

Women can create wonder if empowered socially and economically and can play a distinct role in the economic development of the nation. Women comprise half the population of the world and the harsh reality is women often take a back seat and are financially dependent either on husbands or family and this financial dependence on their male counterparts is itself a root cause of gender disparity. About 30 percent population of India is below the poverty line, and 70 percent of them are women due to the lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to resources like land ownership, and inheritance.² Serious steps should be taken to enhance their capabilities and self-employment.

The gap in employment opportunities between men and women is described by National Family Health Survey data reported by Govt. of India revealing that only 43 percent of married women are employed as against 99 percent of married men.⁹

The biggest hindrance on the way to achieving gender equality in India is equal jobs and equal pay for women employees. The International labor organization Global (ILO) Wage report 2018/19 reportedly states that the average pay gender gap is the highest in India at 34.5 percent among the 73 countries.¹⁰

Nursing and Women Empowerment

Nursing is one of the preferred professions for women in India. Historically nursing profession emerged as a gendered profession and the majority of nursing professionals are women in India. The nursing profession has a wider acceptance as a reputed profession in



Indian society. Nurses are the backbone of any country's healthcare system and represent the largest portion of healthcare workers. Nurses are counting almost 30.5% stack of all health workers in India.¹¹

There is a vast opportunity for women to participate in the health sector as an estimate given by the World Bank that by end of the year 2030 there will be a requirement of 80.2 million health care workers globally. India would require another 2 million doctors and 6 million nurses by that time.¹² Now central government approves 80 percent reservation for recruitment in nursing jobs exclusively for women. This will enable women to get more access to job security.

Undoubtedly nurses handling a patient with empathy and par excellence remain the bridge between science and the human touch. When the world was fighting with deadly COVID-19 pandemic, our nurses were leading from the front and even did not hesitate to sacrifice their life. The nursing profession provides women with a reorganization, increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and autonomy. The professional identity of nurses will be well placed to positively influence their families and other women.

Authors view

Women's empowerment is mainly relying on several factors including access to academics, employment opportunities, social acceptance, and status in the family. Women empowerment highlights two of its important characteristic. Firstly, it is the power to achieve required goals but not overpower others. Secondly, the idea of empowerment is more relevant to those who are powerless whether they are from any group of individuals, class, or caste. Even with a plethora of programs for women's welfare progress is not matching expectations. All required measures should be taken to assure equal access to women and their complete participation in decision-making platforms at every level. The policies should be women-centered to ensure catalysts participation to fill the gaps in policies and implementation.

2. CONCLUSION

At a time when the economy is staring at the prospect of stagflation, sluggishness in the economies across the globe, declining economic growth, and rising unemployment amidst the ongoing deceleration the nursing profession can face the challenge and empower women. In recent years our nation has made immense progress in improving literacy. India continuously working on minimizing the gap in gender equality. The efforts have made gains by ratifying international conventions and formulating domestic policies intended to end gender inequality.

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