

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development through the Concept of Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT: Women perform a crucial role in environmental management and development. This participation is essential to achieve sustainable development and also to promote Gender equality. Firstly, gender equality is an issue across the world. This equality between men and women means to provide equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities as well as social justice to everyone irrespective of gender. Secondly, this equality is responsible to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable development means an equitable distribution of resources for present as well as for future. It is the development which meets the necessities of the present without compromising the future generation to meet their requirements and this cannot be achieved without gender equality. In this perspective, women empowerment plays a key role for gender equality which in turn helps to achieve sustainable development. Although women are considered as weaker sections of the society, they play a crucial role in developing sustainable development. Besides gender equality is a driver of sustainable development in every spheres including ending poverty, hunger, achieve prosperity and a progressive society. This paper therefore discusses the vital role of women empowerment in promoting gender equality and sustainable development which in turn will lead to a progressive and developed nation.

KEYWORD: Women empowerment, Gender equality, Sustainable development, Constitutional provisions, government efforts, India.

Introduction:

The Status of women is in a process to change in the Indian society as well as throughout the world. They have access to more opportunities and their condition has improved a lot. In Beijing in September 1995 the fourth world conference on women emphasized on women empowerment and their equality and full participation is the basis for peace and sustainable development. Also it suggested that both men and women should be equally involved to development policies. Gender equality is a major goal in context of rights but also a key factor for sustainable development, environment management and sustainability. Among the various aspects of Sustainable development, the social aspect is based on the concept of empowerment, Equality and participatory decision making capability. Besides safeguarding the natural environment

sustainability also ensures socio economic development with equal distribution of wealth, power and resources. The social component of sustainable development includes factors like gender equality, empowerment, health, education and democratic participation. Due to the ever increasing population, there is also a rise in the consumption of resources. So it is very essential that besides ensuring the requirements of present population it is also very important to conserve for the future generation. It has been argued that women are a major group whose involvement is necessary for sustainable growth because women play a crucial role in ensuring this development. Women are more concerned about the environmental degradation and they can especially take effective personal actions like recycling, saving water and energy and using environment friendly methods. They also play vital role in socializing and educating their children and make them aware to respect and protect the environment. For this reason it is necessary to promote gender equality. When women will get equal opportunities and rights they would be able to empower and educate them and also to make them cognizant of social and environmental factors. It is only when women are empowered and educated that they would be able to teach their own children and socialize them. In order to play various roles in maintaining ecological balance and to participate in decision making processes of society it is essential to eradicate gender disparity and strengthen women by empowering them. Therefore women's empowerment and gender equality are two factors which are needed to be discussed to bring about sustainable development in the country. Another important point to be discussed are the impacts of various government and non government programs and Indian constitutional provisions as these are having a progressive impact women and therefore women are able to struggle for their rights.

Objective:

- To discuss the concept of women empowerment and gender equality.
- To understand the process of sustainable development.
- To describe the role of women empowerment in promoting gender equality.
- To discuss women participation to achieve sustainable development.
- To exhibit the constitutional provisions and government programs which empower women.
- To point out the progress of women in Indian society.

Methodology:

The present study is based on the discussion method and through collection of data from secondary sources. Secondary data are obtained from various published records, books, newspapers, magazines, journals and government reports.

Conceptualization of Terms**Women Empowerment and gender equality:**

Empowerment means having power and control over their own lives. It is referred to as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their lives and also to achieve self-esteem and self-confidence. In the same way women empowerment is a very vital concept across the world. It is defined as women's capability of decision making and their capacity to lead a life of their own choice. This empowerment should be maintained at individual, household, community and at a broader level. It means accepting women's viewpoint and raising their social status through their literacy, education, and training and also by spreading awareness. Women empowerment makes them capable to determine their rights to bring the required social changes for themselves and others and also promotes women with a sense of self-worth which is essential for development and economics. Empowerment of women needs to be done for humankind to progress. Women should understand the value of self worth so that they can influence each other and boost

the growth of the country. Another important concept is gender equality which is not only fundamental human rights but is also a necessary factor to ensure a peaceful and sustainable society and nation. Gender equality means that every human irrespective of gender barriers should have access to equal opportunities, rights and resources including economic participation, decision making and everyone should be allowed to lead a desired lifestyle. It is a key factor to empower women as when women are treated equally as men they are able to fight for their own rights. Based on the factors of gender disparity women are treated unequally and are considered subordinate to men. Such forms of discrimination should be abolished from society to empower women and to achieve sustainable development which will lead to a progressive nation.

Sustainable Development:

Sustainable Development is an organizing principle which aims to meet human requirements and development goals while also enabling natural systems to provide necessary natural resources and also maintaining ecological balance. It is a kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the future generation and therefore includes both men and women. The concept of sustainable development arises due to various development perspectives which have shifted gradually. It focused only on the economic and productive growth of a nation during 1950s and 1960s, but, during 1970s it shifted to equity matters including social change and progress, equal income distribution, and equality between rich and poor and also men and women. This development perspective also included environmental protections. In the late 1980s the World Commission on Environment and Development defined this worldwide concept as to conserve for the future while satisfying the present needs. Sustainable Development presently has focused on economic, Social and environmental development for future generation. This concept was first institutionalized with the Rio Process initiated at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) was established by United Nations General Assembly in 2015. These 17 goals address various global issues including poverty, hunger, health, well-being, education, gender equality, energy supply, Environment degradation, climate change, peace and justice. And Goal 5 of sustainable development is fifth of the 17 goals and concerned with gender equality and women empowerment. Sustainable Development depends on equal distribution of resources and cannot be achieved without gender equality. Women empowerment is therefore a very crucial process to be achieved to attain sustainable development.

Social Changes and Developments Due to Women Empowerment and Gender Equality:

Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment brings a lot of changes and developments in our society. Most importantly sustainable development is not possible to achieve without empowerment of women and gender equality. These are not only human rights but are also indicators of social changes and sustainable development. Although women play a very crucial role in these factors but still they regarded as weaker sections and backward and are deprived of their rights. Over the years they continue to fight to improve their living standards and for protection of the environment. Women play a vital role in the global environment movement. Besides every woman performs the primary responsibility of child care, nutrition and household management. Yet, despite their role, women are not properly represented and given opportunities in decision making and development issues. Discussing all the contributions of women, it is necessary to abolish gender inequality and empower women. Because women empowerment and their full participation and beneficial involvement ensures sustainable development. Gender equality and women empowerment are closely related to sustainable development and covers a large domain including socio-cultural, economic and environmental aspects. When women experience a desired and safe lifestyle and also a fulfilled and productive life they can reach their full potential and contribute their skills for the development of own family, society and also for the country. With higher literacy and equal pay for work women are able to thrive economically and sustainably alleviates poverty.

Social Development:

Social development or transformation is referred to as a pillar of sustainable development and is impossible without the involvement of women. Over the years the situation of women has changed. In one hand they are worshiped as goddesses but on the other hand they are subjected to harassment, domestic violence, trafficking, dowry deaths etc. Therefore empowering women eradicates such evils from the society and leads to social development because when our society is enveloped in these evils it becomes the main reason for the backwardness of our country. So when gender equality and empowerment is promoted women are able to contribute their skills for the welfare of the nation.

Economic Development:

Economical development is one of the aspects of sustainable development that can be achieved only through adequate participation everyone irrespective of gender, caste, class or religion. Nowadays women perform a key role in the economic development of our nation. They are progressing in equal footings with men in the economic growth process and empowering themselves. Their participation in social life, education, science, technology, employment and politics is increasing day by day. All these factors are noticeable and are creating a good impact on our society because of the empowerment programs. Although, it is true that women still face various inequalities and often are discriminated but still they are struggling to overcome such discriminating factors. Besides various government and non government programs and our constitutional provisions are strengthening and providing support to women in their struggle of becoming empowered and thus they are able to fight for their rights and equal opportunities.

Education Development:

Promoting education to girls insists them to achieve more in their social, economic, career and family lives. When women are educated they are able to fight for their own rights and opportunities and raise their voice against discriminations and inequalities that they forced to face. Besides a woman enact a number of roles in one life including a daughter, a wife and a mother. They play a vital role in society, household and for the environment. Therefore when they are educated they would be able to distinguish between rights and wrongs and contribute for the progress of society and environment and for the welfare of their own family.

Political Development:

Among the various pillars of sustainable development Political development is an essential component. Every country needs a well established and quality political or governance system as a good governance leads to social development, economic development and most importantly environmental protection. In contrast of this there should be active participation of women in governance or administration, especially in decision making position as first of all they will be able to empower themselves and it will influence others and secondly it will reduce corruption and protect the interest of the marginalized sections of the society including women. But despite this, the political participation of women is quite low as compared to men. This is all due to social evils like gender inequality. Now to eradicate such evils of gender inequalities in politics, the Indian constitution has instituted reservations for seats governments. The constitution also attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discriminations based on gender, sex, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labour and reservation of seats for women.

Constitutional Provisions that safeguards the rights of women:

The preamble to the constitution of India ensures justice and social, political, economical equality of dignity and opportunities to every individual and treats both men and women equally. It safeguards every citizen against discrimination and corruption and promotes equality before the law. The Indian Constitution consists

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of provisions that protects women against the social evils that they face and gives them equal rights and opportunities as men.

- **Article 14:** Equality rights and opportunities for men and women in the political economic and social sphere.
- **Article 15(1):** The state is not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, caste, race, sex and place of birth or any of them.
- **Article 15(3):** This provision says that nothing in this article can prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children.
- **Article 16(2):** This article states that no citizen shall on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
- **Article 23(1):** Under this article Human Trafficking and forced labour are prohibited.
- **Article 39(a):** It states that men and women should have equal right to adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- **Article 39(e):** It states that the health strength of women workers are not abused and that citizens are not forced to by economic necessity to enter unsuited work condition.
- **Article 42:** The state to make provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- **Article 51 A(e) :** This provision suggest that every citizen must renounce the harmful practices that affect the dignity of women
- **Article 243D:** Reservations of seats for women in every panchayat.
- **The Marriage Act, 1955** – This prohibits polygamy, polyandry and child marriage and concedes equal right to women to divorce and to remarry.
- **The Hindu Succession Act, 1956** – Which provides for women's right to parental property.
- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**-Which declares the taking of dowry an unlawful activity and thereby prevents the exploitation of women.
- **The Special Marriage Act, 1954**- Which provides right to women on par with men for inter cast marriage, love marriage.
- **The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971**- It legalizes abortion conceding the right of women to go for abortion on the ground of physical and mental health.
- **The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983**- it seeks to stop various types of crimes against women.

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment:

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: Launched by Prime Minister of India this scheme guarantees the safety, survival, and education of girls. This initiative intends to spread social awareness and also improves the effectiveness of the welfare programs for girls. It addresses the issues of decline in gender critical districts and encourages proper safety and quality education for girls. **Working Women Hostel Scheme:** The Scheme was launched in 1972-73 by the government of India. The objective of the scheme is to provide availability of safe and conveniently located environment and accommodations for working women and also promoting day care facilities for their children wherever possible. The government also provides aids to construct new hostels for women and improve the existing accommodations.

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One-Stop Centre Scheme: One-Stop Center Scheme proved a range of services to women who are affected gender based violence like acid assaults, rape and sexual harassment. It is a government sponsored scheme and was launched in 2015. It provider servicer under one roof including police facilitation, medical aids, legal aids, counseling and psycho-social counseling and also temporary shelter for women who are victims of violence and distress.

Women Helpline Scheme: The government introduced a toll free number '181' to provide 24*7 emergency assistance to women experienced violence and abuse in either public or private settings. The Women Helpline Scheme was launched in April 2015 to provide every women with immediate help.

Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme: This scheme establishes a connection between police authorities and local communities to ensure police outreach on crime cases against women such as dowry harassment, child marriage, domestic abuse and domestic violence.

SWADHAR Greh: Its main objective is to ensure social, economic and health security as well as to promote housing, food and cloths and it also provides legal support to women. It is a scheme of Indian Government which was launched in 2018 for the purpose of women empowerment.

STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programs for Women): This scheme was launched to give women work security and training in skill development. This program promotes organizations and institutions with funding so that they can organize training programs for women.

UJJAWAL Scheme: This scheme is generally operated by non- governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to offer direct benefits and efficiency to victims of human trafficking. It prevents human trafficking and safeguards those who are sexually exploited survivors of human trafficking.

Conclusion:

Women are a crucial section of our society and their empowerment is a very vital issue throughout the world. The issue of women empowerment and gender equality is at the top of various important factors across the world. These have a huge impact on our society, economics, and politics and even on our environment. The concept of Sustainable Development is multidimensional and is impossible to achieve without the application of women empowerment and gender equality. Its means that the various pillars of sustainable development including social, economical, educational and political development as well as environmental protection. Attaining these pillars in unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality through various measures. This would strengthen women to reach their highest potential and contributes their skills for the welfare of our nation. Although various government schemes and constitutional provisions as discussed above are supporting the empowerment of women and are working towards abolishing gender equality from our society, but still many a times women are subjected to issues of gender disparity. Therefore, being citizens of a secular nation it is our sole duty and responsibility to respect each other irrespective of gender or religion and respect each other's thoughts and views.

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