

SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPOWERMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN LEADING TO PROGRESSION OF WOMEN

Dr. Radhika Kapur

ABSTRACT

In India, since ancient times, women are regarded as subordinates to men. In primarily rural communities, there has been prevalence of the viewpoint that women are inferior in status as compared to men. Due to this, they have also experienced various forms of abuse and mistreatment. When they recognize the significance of empowerment opportunities, they are able to exercise more control upon their lives. When they acquire empowerment opportunities, they are able to enrich their lives and sustain their livelihoods better. They are able to participate in various tasks and activities, which would lead to improvements in their financial conditions. In addition, they are also able to develop skills and abilities to make wise decisions. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, need and importance of women's empowerment, characteristics of women empowerment, dimensions of women empowerment, approaches to promote empowerment opportunities among women, laws promoting women empowerment and indicators of empowerment.

Keywords: Approaches, Dimensions, Empowerment Opportunities, Indicators, Laws

Empowerment is understood as the process, which enables the individuals to assert control over the factors, which have an influence upon their lives. The expansion of empowerment opportunities for women are regarded as the ones, which enable them to generate awareness in terms of various areas and fields. Through empowerment, women are able to acquire political independence, they become economically productive and are able to make decisions independently. When they participate in any discussion with others, they are able to express proper ideas and viewpoints. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985. In this conference, it was defined as the redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the factors of acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and in terms of the ways in which these can be changed. The other factor is, developing a sense of self-worth, belief in one's ability to secure the desired changes and the right to exercise control over one's life (Mokta, 2014).

The provision of empowerment opportunities to women would enable them to acquire greater control upon their lives. Women in India are regarded as subordinates to men. In some communities, their status is regarded as inferior. Furthermore, women and girls have and in the present too are being subjected to various forms of criminal and violent acts, such as, verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, exploitation, mistreatment, and neglect. These factors are considered as major impediments within the course of their progress and well-being. Therefore, the initiation of empowerment opportunities would enable women to fight against all forms of criminal

and violent acts and enable them to implement appropriate strategies and approaches for enrichment of their lives. Hence, for every community and nation, it is regarded to be of utmost significance to work towards promoting empowerment opportunities for women.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Gender equality and empowerment of women is recognized globally as the key element to achieve progress in all areas. Gender equality is making provision of equal rights, and responsibilities for men and women (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, 2016). The charter of United Nations signed in 1943 is the first international agreement that declared gender equality as the fundamental right. Ever since, there had been many convictions, programs and goals to make provision of assistance to women, conferring upon them the human rights, which are visible and enable them to sustain their living conditions in a well-organized manner. With the main objective of promoting the development of women and to protect their rights, the General Assembly of U.N. adopted, conviction on all forms of discrimination against women on 18th December 1979, which came into operation on 3rd September, 1981 (Chapter IV, n.d.).

The convection also took notice of particular problems experienced by women belonging to rural communities. In addition, the primary role of women towards promoting well-being of their families is also taken into consideration. All the states to the convection agreed to take appropriate measures to enable rural women to participate and benefit from rural development. In spite of many convections and time bound measurable goals, world statistics indicate that the deplorable state of women is the matter of concern (Chapter IV, n.d.). In India, women have been considered as subordinates and their status is regarded inferior to men. It is crucial to bring about changes in these perspectives. Women should be given equal status and promotion of empowerment opportunities for women is regarded to be of utmost significance.

Women – Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor population or almost 900 million of the 1.3 billion people, who live in absolute poverty. Two-third of the world's illiterate population of 876 million people are women. They are involved in the production of 50 percent of food on a global scale and receive only 10 percent of income (Chapter IV, n.d.). Women are primarily regarded as household managers, particularly within the Indian society. They need to possess adequate knowledge in terms of implementation of household responsibilities, child development, taking care of the needs and requirements of elderly individuals and health care.

Earnings – Earnings are regarded to be of utmost significance, especially in the sustenance of the living conditions. Particularly within the organized sector, the earnings of women are less as compared to men. In this case, they are being discriminated against, particularly in terms of earnings. They are paid less, particularly for the same job duties performed. In the unorganized sector, women do not earn much, as compared to the job duties, they are required to implement. On the other hand, in the management of household responsibilities too, they are required to work

diligently. Their work is unpaid within the house and less paid outside the house. Hence, to enable them to enhance their earnings, empowerment opportunities are important.

Health – Women and children, belonging to poverty stricken and deprived families usually experience health problems, illnesses and a high mortality rate (Promoting Women's Empowerment for Better Health Outcomes for Women and Children, 2013). The individuals are required to take care of their health and well-being from the initial stage. The individuals, belonging to all age groups and backgrounds need to ensure that they take care of their health conditions adequately. When one will have good health, then they will be able to carry out all tasks and activities, satisfactorily. Women need to take care of their mental as well as physical health conditions. For the maintenance of good physical and mental health conditions, it is vital for them to consume a healthy and nutritious diet, possess adequate knowledge of the tasks and activities that they are engaged in, maintain good terms and relationships with others, establish positive thinking and in old age, they need to obtain regular medical check-ups.

Education – Of the 960 million persons in the world, who do not possess literacy skills, 640 million are women, which account for two-third. In 2001, the literacy rate of women was increased to 54.16 percent, which was lower as compared to men. Whereas, the school enrolment rates of the girls have been and continue to be lower as compared to boys, belonging to all levels and age groups. The drop-out rates were also higher among girls (Chapter IV, n.d.). This shows that in the acquisition of education, girls experienced setbacks. Hence, when the need and importance of empowerment will be recognized, then girls would acquire education.

Politics – Political space has also been monopolized by men. The representation of women as members of the parliament and state legislations has never exceeded seven percent and has remained around five percent, over the years, despite the increase in the visibility of women. The representation of women in the decision making processes has been low (Chapter IV, n.d.). In India, particularly in ancient times, women were obliged to obey the instructions of men and were not allowed to express their ideas and viewpoints. But in the present existence, in some of the rural communities, they are still regarded as subordinates to men, whereas, in urban communities, they are participating in various political campaigns and decision making processes.

Socio-Cultural – The preference for the male children leads to an increase in the exploitation and mistreatment of girls. When girls are born within the families, they are regarded as liabilities. The families and communities are of the viewpoint that girls would not yield any returns upon investment. When empowerment opportunities are promoted among girls, then they are able to render an effective contribution towards promoting well-being of their families and communities. The individuals in families and communities are also able to bring about transformations in the viewpoints and perspectives that empowerment of girls and women is essential to sustain better livelihoods.

Entrepreneurship – Women's entrepreneurship is both regarding the position of women within the society and in terms of the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women

entrepreneurs normally are required to experience number of barriers within the course of implementation of tasks and activities (Chapter IV, n.d.). It is vital particularly for the family members to realise that they should not be over-burdened with work. Hence, carrying out all the household responsibilities as well as full-time jobs may prove to be disadvantageous to them. Increase in the participation of women in the labour force is regarded as a prerequisite for improving their position within the society. Furthermore, participation of women, who are self-employed is also encouraged.

Information Technology – The single most resource that liberates women from the conditions of poverty and backwardness and leads to their empowerment is knowledge. Such knowledge society will lead to empowerment at all levels and among all the key actions of society. It is vital to observe empowerment of women through information technology (IT). Through IT, women will be able to acquire information and augment their knowledge in terms of various areas and fields. Access to information is regarded as the key for promoting economic, political and social empowerment of women (Chapter IV, n.d.). Through the use of IT, women are able to become more informative and knowledgeable.

Micro-finance – Micro-finance institutions render a significant contribution in the empowerment of women. There are mainly two perspectives on the empowerment potential of the micro-finance programs. One perspective, puts emphasis upon the negative aspects, such as, men tend to make use of loans. Whereas, other perspective, puts emphasis that household with loans, generally have higher income and level of consumption, regardless of the gender dynamics within the household. This perspective puts emphasis upon the consensual consumption of the households, with benefits to the entire family. When benefits are given to the entire family, then women too benefit (Chapter IV, n.d.).

Agriculture – In India, over 70 percent of the population is residing in rural communities. In these communities, men and women are primarily involved in agriculture and farming practices. The women employed in the agricultural sector, mainly do not possess literacy skills and are unaware of various aspects. The National Agricultural Policy of India (2000) and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) have put emphasis upon the need for incorporating gender issues in the agricultural development programme to make provision of recognition to the women's role as farmers and producers of crop and livestock, users of technology, active agents in marketing and processing and storage of food and agricultural labourers (Chapter IV, n.d.).

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The major characteristics of women empowerment have been stated as follows: (Chapter IV, n.d.).

1. Women empowerment means giving power to women to enable them to enhance their livelihoods opportunities.

2. Women empowerment enables the inculcation of a greater degree of self-confidence and self-esteem among women to make them independent.
3. Women empowerment is the process of acquiring power for women to understand their rights and to carry out the responsibilities towards oneself and others in an effective manner.
4. Women empowerment provides capacity and power to resist discriminatory treatment against them.
5. Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves to augment self-confidence and self-reliance.
6. Women empowerment provides greater autonomy to women.
7. Women empowerment means having greater control over material resources, financial resources and property.
8. Women empowerment challenges traditional power relations and equations.
9. Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structure of the society.
10. Women empowerment is referred to the participation of women in discussion meetings, events or activities, where they are allowed to give their ideas and perspectives.
11. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive power of the existing gender and social relations.
12. Women empowerment enables them to take proper care of their physical and mental health conditions.
13. Women empowerment enables them to recognize their complete identity in all spheres of life.
14. Women are given equal rights and opportunities within society.
15. Empowerment means making provision of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and freedom from customs and beliefs.
16. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familiar and economic spheres and various levels, such as, individual, group and community.
17. Empowerment of women is regarded as a dynamic process on a continuous basis. It upgrades the skills and abilities of women to change the structures and philosophies and principles, which enables them to remain subordinate.
18. Women empowerment enables the women to generate awareness in terms of various areas that enable them to sustain their living conditions adequately.

DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The dimensions of women empowerment have been classified into five categories and these have been stated as follows: (Mokta, 2014).

Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension refers to women having the understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the macro and micro levels. It involves making of selections that may be contradictory to cultural expectations and norms. For instance, within a household or community, there are certain customs and traditions, which may be rigidly followed. In such cases, women, who are empowered, may implement their tasks and activities in accordance to their viewpoints and perspectives and may not follow the traditional customs.

Psychological Dimension

The psychological dimension includes the beliefs that women can put into practice at the personal and societal levels, to bring about improvements in their individual realities and the society, in which they live. The psychology is related to the mind-sets of the individuals. Empowerment enables the women to acquire an efficient understanding of the morals, ethics, standards and principles. When they put into operation, these traits, they are able to implement honesty, righteousness and truthfulness in the implementation of tasks and activities.

Economic Dimension

The economic dimension enables women to exercise more control over the productive resources. As it is widely understood that women are primarily responsible for the management of household responsibilities, hence, they need to possess adequate knowledge and be empowered in terms of management of finances. In the management of economic dimension, women are able to exercise financial autonomy. This aspect is vital not only in the management of household responsibilities, but also in other aspects, such as, planning of trips, purchasing other items, child development, health care and so forth.

Political Dimension

The political dimension puts emphasis upon inculcation of skills and abilities among women to bring about changes. When changes need to be brought about in any aspects, then it is vital to conduct an appropriate analysis. In addition, organization and mobilization of changes need to take into consideration numerous factors. For instance, when changes are needed to be brought about within the society, such as, alleviating the conditions of poverty, then it is vital for individuals to conduct an analysis of causes of poverty and what measures need to be brought about in its alleviation.

Physical Dimension

Physical dimension is primarily concerned with the maintenance of good health conditions. It is vital for women to be physically healthy and sound, especially, when they are engaged in certain tasks or activities. In order to remain physically active and take care of one's health and well-being, it is vital for them to possess adequate knowledge in terms of proper factors. These

include, adequate diet and nutrition, physical activities, positive thinking, putting one's best abilities in the implementation of tasks and functions and forming positive thinking.

APPROACHES TO PROMOTE EMPOWERMENT OPPORTUNITIES AMONG WOMEN

It is essential to identify the approaches that are being put into practice in a well-organized manner to promote empowerment opportunities for women and girls. Some of the important approaches have been stated as follows:

Leadership Promotes Gender Equality

Under the principle of leadership promotes gender equality, the main areas that need to be taken into account are, affirm high level support and formulate innovative policies for gender equality and human rights. Company-wide goals need to be established and targets need to be framed for gender equality. Augmentation of progress and development is regarded as an important factor in terms of not only the individuals and the communities, but also the entire nation. It is vital to promote the participation of internal and external stakeholders in the development of the policies and programs to promote empowerment opportunities for women. In addition, it is important to ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive. When the formulation of policies and measures takes place, it is vital to ensure that women should be provided with equal rights and opportunities, so they are able to become achievement-oriented and accomplish their desired goals and objectives (Women's Empowerment Principles, n.d.).

Equal Opportunity, Inclusion and Non-discrimination

Within home, as well as outside, such as, educational institutions, employment settings as well as in terms of rights and opportunities, women and girls should be provided with equal opportunities. Within the household, if there are boys and girls, then parents need to ensure that girls too need to be provided with equal opportunities, particularly in terms of education, learning, skills development, health care, and participation in other tasks and activities. In employment settings, it is vital for the employers to ensure that women are paid equal wages as men, for the same work performed. Within the workplace, women should be provided autonomy in expressing their ideas and perspectives and should be treated with respect and courtesy. When any discussions are carried out, then it is vital for others to allow them to give their suggestions. Hence, participation of women in the decision making matters and in expressing their ideas and perspectives are the ones that are considered to be of utmost significance that enables them to acquire empowerment opportunities.

Health and Safety

Health and safety are considered as important factors regarding women, belonging to all age groups, categories and backgrounds. First and foremost, it is vital for them to take care of their health care and ensure they are safe and secure within as well as outside the home. In order to

promote ones, health and safety, it is vital for women to possess adequate knowledge and be informative. For the promotion of good health, it is vital for women and girls to ensure they consume nutritious diet, get engaged in physical activities, stay occupied and establish good terms and relationships with others. These aspects not only enable them to maintain their physical health but also psychological health. For safety purposes, it is vital for women to understand factors, such as, not going out alone, especially during the night, not communicating with individuals not known, keeping the doors and windows locked, especially when being alone at home and keeping ones valuables and finances safe.

Freedom from Crime and Violence

The prevalence of crime and violence against women has been observed to a major extent throughout the country. Girls and women, belonging to all age groups, categories and backgrounds have been subjected to these acts. The various forms of criminal and violent acts that they experience within as well as outside the home include, verbal abuse physical abuse, sexual harassment, neglect, discriminatory treatment, acid attacks, rape and even murder. When women and girls experience these acts, then they not only experience mental health problems, such as, depression, stress, anxiety and trauma, but also their physical health gets affected. Therefore, it can be stated that freedom from these acts is regarded as indispensable. To prevent these acts from assuming a major form, it is vital for the individuals within the community to inculcate the traits of morality and ethics among themselves. They should form constructive viewpoints and treat women with reverence and admiration.

Education and Training

Education and training are regarded as the major instruments that would render a significant contribution in not only enabling them to sustain their living conditions adequately, but also in attaining empowerment opportunities. In order to promote empowerment opportunities among women and girls, who are not educated and are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness, education and training is regarded to be of utmost significance. Women and girls, belonging to poverty stricken, deprived and marginalized sections of the society, who struggle to make ends meet, need to be empowered. The first and foremost step is, literacy skills are promoted among them, by conducting tuition classes. When they are able to read and write, then they are encouraged to get enrolled in schools to acquire formal education. On the other hand, there have been cases of women and girls, who are unable to get enrolled in schools to acquire education. Hence, there have been initiation of training and development programs in terms of various areas, such as, artworks, handicrafts, pottery making etc. Women, belonging to all age groups can get enrolled in these programs to hone their skills. Therefore, skills development programs can enable them to acquire employment opportunities.

Community Leadership and Engagement

Community leadership and engagement is also considered an important aspect in promoting empowerment opportunities among women. Within the community, when there are organization of

events, activities or functions, then it is vital to encourage women to participate. For instance, when there is an organization of a fair, which requires large extent of planning and organizing, then women should be communicated with and they are encouraged to participate. This particularly applies in terms of women and girls, belonging to deprived, underprivileged and socio-economically backward sections of the society. When these women and girls would participate in cultural programs, then they would generate awareness in terms of various aspects that are considered crucial, particularly in terms of empowerment opportunities. These include, development of effective communication skills, personality traits, and so forth. In addition, promotion and recognition of women's leadership and their contributions to the well-being and development of the community and ensuring their fair representations are also aspects of community leadership and engagement.

Reducing the Pressure of Household Management

The management of household responsibilities is regarded as a comprehensive aspect. Within the Indian society, women are regarded as the ones, who are vested with the tasks and responsibilities of the household, whereas, men get engaged in employment opportunities to generate income. The management of household responsibilities is not an easy task. There are number of aspects that need to be taken into consideration, such as, cleaning, washing, management of civic amenities, preparation of meals, gardening and so forth. Within rural communities, they get involved in the rearing of livestock as well. In addition to these tasks, they are vested with the functions of child development, health care and in taking care of the needs and requirements of the elderly family members. For the promotion of empowerment opportunities among women, it is vital to reduce the pressure of household management. The men and women need to divide among themselves, the tasks and responsibilities and women should not be pressurized to implement the household responsibilities, solely by themselves. Household responsibilities also require manual tasks, hence, it is vital for women to obtain assistance from domestic helpers and service providers. In addition to household management, they need to get involved in activities and tasks that would promote empowerment opportunities.

Economically Independent and Self-Reliant

To acquire economic independence and self-reliance, women as well as their families are required to take into account important aspects. These include, making provision of rights to them to get engaged into employment settings, higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in the economic and commercial fields, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, economic independence and self-reliance enables them to manage their own lives and make appropriate decisions. In addition, women are able to promote their welfare, satisfy the basic needs, and access resources. Apart from sustaining their living conditions adequately, they are able to augment livelihood opportunities for their families as well as the community (Chapter IV, n.d.).

Science and Technology

With developments in the field of science and technology, women are able to carry out tasks and activities, within as well as outside the home in an appropriate manner. Their knowledge and experience are adequately recognized in sustainable development. In the present existence, science and technology have influenced the lives of women to major extent. They are making use of it, even if they do not possess literacy skills. Women belonging to rural communities and economically backward sections of the society and elderly women are making use of technology, primarily for communicating and recreational purposes (Chapter IV, n.d.). There is a great potential for empowering women with appropriate and sustainable technologies. The major significance of science and technology have been recognized in generating awareness and upgrading ones knowledge in terms of various areas. Through the use of internet, they are able to acquire an understanding in terms of various subjects, concepts and aspects.

Women's Organization

Women's organization have come to be recognized as the primary source of power, strength and position of women in modern India. Women's organization enables them to fight against injustice, discriminatory treatment and criminal and violent acts. Research has indicated, there have been establishment of women's organizations, throughout the country, which have the major objective of helping women to acquire empowerment opportunities. Particularly the ones, who have been experiencing or have experienced injustice and mistreatment. Women self-help groups in rural communities are working towards organization of women power. Women from different sections are being brought together and organized into an association, with the main objective of eradicating all kinds of practices that are disadvantageous and impose detrimental effects upon their living standards. These include, domestic violence, polygamy, sexual harassment, female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriages, dowry, devadasi system and so forth. Apart from these, employment opportunities are provided to women, who are illiterate. Furthermore, leadership skills are promoted among them, which would enable them to acquire empowerment opportunities (Chapter IV, n.d.)

LAWS PROMOTING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the states to adopt measures that would curb discriminatory treatment against women. There have been implementation of laws, policies, and measures that have the major objective of giving women equal treatment. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1978), there has been a marked change in the approaches to women issues, from welfare to development. From the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997), emphasis shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, empowerment of women have been recognized as the main issue in recognising the status of women within the country (Mokta, 2014).

The law can create empowerment opportunities for women by conferring the rights directly to the person, whom it intends to empower. For the promotion of empowerment opportunities

among women within the country, there have been amendment and modification of certain existing laws and policies. This is done in accordance to the need of time, which means, when empowerment of women is taken into consideration, emphasis is put upon women, belonging to economically weaker sections of the society (Chapter IV, n.d.). The Indian Constitution has the following provisions to promote gender equality: (Chapter IV, n.d.).

1. Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees to all protections of laws and equality before law. Both these expressions have been used in the “universal declaration of human rights”. The equality before law is guaranteed to all without any regards to gender, race, colour or nationality.
2. Article 15(3) empowers the state to make special provision for women. Women require special treatment due to their nature. Women are considered as weaker in personality, due to this, they are considered as subordinates to men.
3. Article 16(2) lays down the rule that no citizen can be discriminated against the attainment of employment opportunities on the basis of factors such as, religion, gender, race, caste, ethnicity or socio-economic background.
4. Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243D provides that in every panchayat, seats will be reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Not less than one-third shall be reserved at the village level in a manner, as the legislature of the state.
5. Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243T provides that one-third of the seats in municipal corporations shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the municipality.

INDICATORS OF EMPOWERMENT

There are various indicators of empowerment. At the individual level, participation in decision making processes, ability to prevent violence, self-confidence and self-esteem, and improvement in the health and nutritional status are the major indicators. At the community levels, important indicators are existence of women’s organizations, increased number of women leaders, involvement of women in the formulation of tools and other welfare measures and application of appropriate technology and so forth. At the national level, the indicators are awareness of his or her social and political rights, adequate representation in the legislative bodies, integration of women in the national development plans and so forth. (Chapter IV, n.d.).

The Beijing World Conference on Women (1995) identified the qualitative and quantitative indicators, which have been stated as follows: (Chapter IV, n.d.).

The Qualitative Indicators of Empowerment

1. Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence.

2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and the awareness levels on issues, affecting community at large and women in particular. Regarding women, the important areas are, women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy etc. depending on the program.
3. Increase or decrease in the personal leisure time and time for children.
4. Increase or decrease in the workloads of women as a result of new programs.
5. Changes in the roles and responsibilities of the family and community.
6. Visible increase or decrease in the violence against women and girls.
7. Response to and changes in the customs that impose negative effects on women. For example, child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows and so forth.
8. Changes in the participation levels of women, i.e. are more women attending public meetings and participation in the training programs? Are more women demanding participation in other events and functions, associated with their lives.
9. Increase in bargaining and negotiating power of women as individuals within homes and communities as well as in collectives of women.
10. Increased access to and ability to get information and knowledge not only in terms of the project, but also in terms of the aspects that have an influence upon their lives.
11. Formation of cohesive and articulate women's groups at the village level, district, block and state levels.
12. Positive changes in the social attitudes among the community members towards discrimination against women and girl children.
13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household.
14. The decision making of women in terms of work that they are engaged in and income.

The Quantitative Indicators of Empowerment

The quantitative indicators of empowerment have been stated as follows: (Mokta, 2014).

1. Demographic trends need to be taken into consideration, such as, maternal mortality rate, fertility rate, sex ratio, life expectancy at birth and the average age of marriage.
2. Number of women participating in different development programs.
3. Greater access and control of community resources, government schemes, such as, crèche, credit, co-operative and non-formal education.
4. Changes brought about in the physical health conditions and nutritional status.
5. Change in literacy and enrolment levels.
6. Participation of women in the political processes.

CONCLUSION

Bringing women into the mainstream of development has been a major concern of the government, since the country achieved its independence. In order to empower and bring them into the mainstream, a facilitating environment with the policies, programs and mechanisms have been created at various levels. The main purpose of this chapter is to recognize the significance of

empowerment opportunities among women. The main areas that have been taken into account are, need and importance of women empowerment, characteristics of women empowerment, dimensions of women empowerment, approaches to promote empowerment opportunities among women, laws promoting women empowerment and indicators of empowerment. It is vital to acquire an efficient understanding of the need and significance of women empowerment. Under this, the major factors that have been taken into account are, women, earnings, health, education, politics, socio-cultural, entrepreneurship, information technology, micro-finance and agriculture. The dimensions of women empowerment are, cognitive dimension, economic dimension, psychological dimension, political dimension and physical dimension.

Approaches to promote empowerment opportunities among women include, leadership promotes gender equality, equal opportunity, inclusion and non-discrimination, health and safety, freedom from crime and violence, education and training, community leadership and engagement, reducing the pressure of household management, economically independent and self-reliant, science and technology and women's organization. In order to promote empowerment opportunities among women, functionaries of the government, the bureaucracy, judiciary and other organizations have been rendering an effective contribution towards the promotion of empowerment opportunities among women. The indicators of empowerment are of two types, qualitative and quantitative. The role of non-government organizations is primarily dedicated towards promoting empowerment opportunities among women, particularly the ones, who have been victims of crime and violence. For strengthening empowerment opportunities, it is vital for the individuals, especially within the rural communities to form constructive viewpoints regarding women and girls. They should be provided with equal rights and opportunities within as well as outside the home.

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