

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: THE JOURNEY FROM MDG 3 TO SDG 5

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Abstract

Indian society is basically a patriarchal society from ancient period. It is also a matter of fact that in the Vedic age women enjoyed good amount of freedom and equality. Women use to participate in all sphere of social life like male, but during the later Vedic period (1000BC to 500 BC) women began to lose their position in the society. The males began to dominate and impose different restrictions on women. Many restrictions are present even today but the form and pattern is different. India has a long history of women's movement. During the British colonial rule and post-independence period feminist movement took a new height. In the global scenario United Nation with its member states in the year September, 2000 set eight goals to achieve for the betterment of the society. Among the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000) one goal is to empower women and promote gender equality. In 2015 UN found that throughout the world the achievement was not remarkable. Then the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 at UN Summit, officially came into force on 1st January 2016. Hear SDG 5 is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' by 2030. Now we are in the middle of 2022, it is time to have a look at our society about the progress of our goals. For this reason, an attempt has been made in this research article to find out the status of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in India in the Context of MDG 3 and SDG 5.

Keywords: Indian Society, Patriarchy, Women empowerment, MDG, SDG.

Introduction

On 5th June, 2022, a man cut his wife's hand when he came to know that his wife named Renu Khatun got a government job as a nurse. The incident took place in West Bengal, one of the state of India. The incident is not an isolated incident. The action is the reflection of patriarchal thought where male ego cannot tolerate that his wife's income is more than him. Economic

independence is one of the major indicators of women empowerment and for thousands of years women are denied this economic independence in almost every part of the world. The entire world is well aware about domestic, economic, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and digital violence, others includes femicide, honor killing, rape, sexting, female trafficking, female genital mutilation and so on.

The civilized population of the world wants to stop all these violence. Sadly, it has not been stopped. In fact, in many parts of the world it has increased. These crimes against women can only be reduced through equality and women empowerment. Throughout the ages women have been deprived of their human rights. It is also true that throughout the ages there were people and organizations that fought for women's rights and against gender discrimination. In modern days United Nation is one of such organization that is working hard to achieve gender equality and women empowerment globally. In this direction, both MDGs and SDGs are very important steps taken by UN.

Methodology

The present research article is a qualitative in nature. Data has been collected through observation and different government and non government reports, blogs, journal articles and different official documents.

Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations Millennium Declaration that was signed in the month of September 2000, the world leaders committed themselves to fight against poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. This is also known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There are total of eight goals, the world leaders have pledged to achieved year by 2015. These are: To eliminate extreme poverty and hunger to achieve global primary education, to empower women and promote gender equality, to reduce child mortality, to promote mental health, to fight malaria, HIV/AIDS and other disease, to promote environmental sustainability and to develop a universal partnership for development.

This article focuses on gender equality and women empowerment as in MDG 3 -To empower women and promote gender equality. Target was to ensure that, by 2015, every boy and girls will be able to complete primary schooling. Another target was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education not later than 2015.

Unfortunately, as per 2011 census report, literacy rate in India was 82.14% for males and 65.46% for females. The gap in male-female literacy rate was **16.68%**. The census report of 2001 showed that the literacy rate for male was 75.85 % and for female was 54.16 %. The gap in male-female literacy rate was **21.69%**. The comparative study clearly shows that the achievement is very low and we are far behind the target. In the month of May 2013, the Ministry for Women and Child Development, Govt. of India, based on the recommendation of the Committee of Governors constituted by the President of India, established a High Level Committee to see the Status of Women in India. In their report (2015) it has been said that ‘only 25 % of Indian women are working’. 15.5% of women in urban India are in the labor force compared to 30% of women in rural India. Again only 4% of total women employed in India are in the organized sector and they enjoy formal job security and benefits. Most of the Indian women depend on their partner regarding financial matters. From the report it is clear that the status of gender equality in job sector is far from the target.

Talking about violence against women, National Crime Record Bureau data shows that from 2005 to 2015 crime against women have increased. Crime like rape and sexual assault, kidnapping and abduction of women, dowry deaths, and insult to the modesty of women, cruelty by husband or his relatives are included in the list.

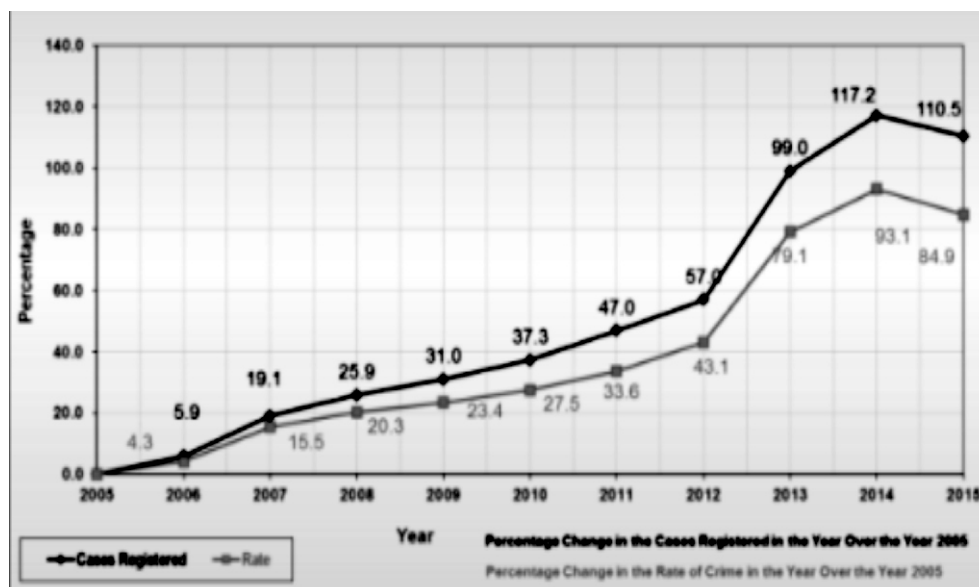


Figure 1: Percentage change in cases Registered and rate of Crime against Women during the year Over 2005 Crime in India-2015 (ncrb.gov.in)

Participation in politics and decision making ability is another indicator of women empowerment. Women's participation in politics is not very high. There is a huge gap between men and women in political activities. For this reason 33% reservation for women is ensured through Constitutional Amendments, because of the reservation policy today many women are taking part in politics but once they sit on the chair, the male member of the family or party takes the decision on their behalf. 'The decision making positions of the parties have negligible presence of women. Even senior women with large experience are sidelined when it comes to allocating positions of responsibility within the parties' (Status on Women, 2015). Base on the above discussion it is quite clear that even after MDGs presence; from 2000 to 2015 the progress was very slow in terms of gender equality and women empowerment. The situation was quite more or less same in most of the countries. But it is also true that for the first time MDGs provided a common vision to the world leaders that every nation should work hard to make this planet a better place.

On 20th to 22nd June 2012, The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which was build on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These SDGs become the post 2015 development agenda. It was a massive collaborative effort. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Among those goals, Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is the topic of discussion in this article. Under Goal 5, each target is discussed carefully.

The major objectives of this goal are:

1. To end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
2. To eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
3. To eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
4. To recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
5. To ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

6. To ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences
7. To undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
8. To enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
9. To adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels'

Seven years have passed since world leaders have agreed to SDGs. Now let's have a look at the status of gender equality and women empowerment as prescribed in SDG 5, in present Indian scenario.

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Every child deserves to reach her or his full potential, but gender inequalities in their lives and in the lives of those who care for them hinder this reality'. (unicef.org). Indian constitution provided equal rights and privileges to both male and female, but unfortunately most of the women can't enjoy their rights which were guaranteed to them. Government of India has taken lot of steps to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Unfortunately patriarchal thoughts are still there among huge number of people. Discrimination is visible in the social life as well as family life. In many family boys enjoy special status and treatment. Compared to their sisters, the boy gets better schooling, better food, more love and affection and so on. Many Indian parents don't want female child. Even today many educated parents prefer male child. Males usually get extra privilege. As per census 2011, there were 940 women for every 1,000 men and the child sex ratio is 918 girls for 1,000 boys, which is quite alarming. In spite of the government and many organizations's effort illegal female infanticide has not stopped fully. Discrimination begins when the child is in the womb. Things are changing slowly. Gender sensitization program, law and education are making people more sensitive towards female infanticide. India's GDI value in 2000 was .736, in 2015 was .809 and in 2019 was .820 which clearly shows a positive change.

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

With the increase of population Violence against women is also increasing in Indian society. Year 2021 witnessed more crime against women than year 2020. Domestic violence is a major problem in Indian society. Many women believe that it is the right of the husband to assault their wife. Poverty and lack of education is mainly responsible for violence against women and also women trafficking.

Human trafficking is another problem. Figure 2 shows that it is increasing.

Sl. No	Crime Head	Year					Percentage Variation in 2015 Over 2014
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
1	Procurement of Minor Girls (Sec. 366-A IPC)	862	809	1,224	2,020	3,087	52.8
2	Importation of Girls from Foreign Country (Sec.366B IPC)	80	59	31	13	6	-53.8
3	Selling of Minors for Prostitution (Sec. 372 IPC)#	113	108	100	82	111	35.4
4	Buying of Minor for Prostitution (Sec. 373 IPC)#	27	15	6	14	11	-21.4
5	Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act 1956	2,435	2,563	2,579	2,617	2,641	0.9
6	Human Trafficking (Sec. 370 & 370 A IPC) *	-	-	-	720	1,021	41.8
Total Cases of Human Trafficking		3,517	3,554	3,940	5,466	6,877	25.8

Figure 2: Crime Head-wise Incidence of Various Crimes under Human Trafficking during 2011 - 2015 and Percentage Variation in 2015 over 2014. (ncrb.gov.in)

There is a section of working women those who are exploited by their family members. Though they work hard, but when they get salary, their family members use to take all the money. The woman don't have the right to take any decision, she don't have any right over her hard earned money. In this digital society women becomes prey. Almost in every 10 minutes one woman becomes a victim of cyber abuse. Government of India has set up National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal to reduce cyber crime.

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Nowadays, it has been noted that people are raising their voices against early child and forced marriage. Many times it had been seen that even the minors have approached the police and administration to complain against their relatives or parents. Female genital mutilation is not common in India. Very few people practice this inhuman act. Those who have faced it, raised their voices and there is hope that this practice will end soon.

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

In a male dominated society the work of a house wife is totally neglected. In Indian society, the house wives do not get proper recognition. One must take a day's leave and simply watch their house wives or female members of the family from morning till night. Apart from family, it has been observed that females are under paid. Government of India have introduced a new labor law in 2020 (New Labour Code For New India) where the government made the provision of equal remuneration to male and female workers, increased the paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks and many more things to value the women workforce.

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Women's participation in political, economic and public life was very low even few years back. As government of India reserved 33% seats for women, today many women are participating in politics, economic and public life. From this point of view Indian society is going through a drastic change. Even few years back, there was handful of women those who use to participate in political, economic and public life. Now even in the grass root level there are many women very much active in politics, many women working in corporate and government sector, there are also many successful business women. Few years back maximum women in chair did not have the right to take any decision. In most of the cases their male partner or male party members use to take decision on their behalf. Now things are changing. Women are taking their own decision in office. It has been also observed that the male members are not happy every time. Many time the women struggles against the male counterpart to establish their existence in the office and public life. Good sign is that today the women are fighting back.

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

In 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, sexual health was mention as an aspect of sexuality, over which women's autonomy was recognized thus: "The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion,

discrimination and violence.” WHO defines sexual health as:“...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” From all this point of view, Indian women are far away from achieving their right. The government spending on health care in India is only 1.2 per cent of GDP, or about Rs. 1,300 per capita (2016– 17). India was one of the first countries in the world who developed legal and policy framework related to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. But Indian girls and women cannot enjoy their rights because of poor quality health service. One another important reason is that women do not have the decision taking authority in family life.

In Indian family generally, it is the husband who takes the decision of sexual life. Even the women have very less view on when to have a child, how many children to have and so on.

The attitude of the people needs to renovate. The government has introduced Life Skill Education to spread awareness among the students regarding sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

Government of India have made all the necessary laws that women gets equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership, control over land, and other forms of property. Financial services, inheritance and natural resources. The new labour code ‘Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020’ is the latest law made by the Government of India to ensure equal wages and opportunity. However, in social settings problems are still there. Generally the male members do not want to share their parental property with their married sisters. As a married women, they do not have firm right on husband’s or in-laws property. In most of the cases women are treated as second class citizen in the family.

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

India is a huge country with 28 states. Status of women in all states is not

same. In states like West Bengal women enjoy more rights than women in Rajasthan. In general, in most of the states based on financial condition and education most girls and women can use information and communication technology. Many women have started online business using information and communication technology. Women and girls also get education and knowledge from ICT, which helps them to empower themselves. Statistics says that 'there is a clear gender disparity when it comes to internet usage in India. There is less number of female internet users in India as compared to male users. Among states, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Delhi have a higher proportion of female Internet users, while the male and female break up at the all-India level stands at 67% and 33%, respectively, the breakup in urban areas is 62% and 38% respectively. In rural areas, the gap is wider with men accounting for almost two-thirds of the internet users at 72%, while women account for 28%'. (financialexpress.com, 2019).

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Indian Constitution and Government of India have adopted many policies and law to ensure gender equality and empowerment at all levels. In spite of that India is far away from the target. The main reason behind this present failure is attitude towards women as a whole. Patriarchal mentality is the major barrier to gender equality. Government should organize more awareness programme to spread awareness and importance of women empowerment.

Proper education can only change the scenario. Teachers and classrooms should take more responsibility to achieve gender equality. Fortunately the youths of today are more conscious than previous generation. They are less sensitive to the traditional attitude towards women. They are modern and they believe in equality. With this population, India will achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels quickly.

Major Constitutional Provisions, policies, law and schemes on women empowerment in India:

After independence, government of India is trying hard to reduce gender inequalities and promote women empowerment. For this, government has introduced many policies, law and schemes. Apart from that, Indian constitution has made provisions to empower women and make the country a gender neutral country.

Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women came into force in 1986. This scheme was established to provide employment opportunities for women, and also the skill and training needed to become self-employed. Other objectives of this scheme include: To provide training to develop various skills, for 5 years. Helping various women groups to set up employment programmes of their own. Providing access to health care, literacy, and legal knowledge. The various sectors covered by this scheme are agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, sericulture, fisheries, handlooms. It also includes other skills like learning English, hospitality, travel, and tourism and so on.

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001

The main objectives are the upliftment and well-being of Indian women. Some of the other principles of this policy are: To create an environment where women realize their full potential. To provide equal participation and opportunities to women, and also provide them with decision-making powers. To give equal access to health services, quality education and training, equal pay and remuneration, all the necessary guidance required. To incorporate effective courts and legal systems, to protect women against discrimination.

The National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women was set up in 1992. It was implemented to protect the legal rights of women. The main objectives of the commission were: To keep a check on the legal protections that are available to women. To recommend legal measures. To solve the grievances and issues of women. To help the government in implementing various policies for women. The commission consists of the Chairman, five members nominated by the Central Government, including one member from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and a member-secretary. Others empowerment policies are: Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Scheme (2016), and Kanyashree Prakalpa

Conclusion

Awareness and sensitivity are two very important factors to achieve gender equality and women empowerment in the society. Different international organizations like United Nation and governments of all countries can set up different goals and different laws, but if common people do not have awareness and sensitivity towards women then it will be very difficult to achieve SDG5. Local government, NGOs, educational institutes in all levels, different political parties, clubs, corporate organizations should

organize gender sensitization and gender awareness program repeatedly to spread awareness and sensitivity among the common people. School education, higher education and above all the teaching community should be more gender sensitive. Teacher training institutes must be more gender sensitive. This will help in producing gender balance in the country. The society must encourage the girls to speak, let the women realize that they are not voiceless, they also have a voice. Let the women of our country and the world develops self confidence. 2030 is not very far. All must work hard. Otherwise United Nation will have to set another goal with new time limit.

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