

## **Consequences of Empowerment and Social Change among Urban Working Women**

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*There have been significant advances for women in urban India in relation to education and employment over the past decade leading to their empowerment. The present paper is an attempt to analyze sociological issues in empowerment and social change among urban working women in teaching profession. Empirical data collected from 200 college teachers in a metropolitan city of Uttar Pradesh in India have shown that education and employment have significantly contributed to their empowerment, which in tern, had led to changes in their status and role as well as views about social values, besides enhanced gender equality among them. The paper also gives some suggestions for their empowerment.*

[**Keywords :** Empowerment of women, Working women, Status and role, Gender equality, Social values]

### **1. Introduction**

The present age is the era of democracy and freedom and equality is its foundation. In this system, there is no discrimination

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on the basis of sex, caste and *varna*, class, race, religion or region. All round development of any society is possible only when there is active and equal participation of women in it. Therefore, in the process of development, women's cooperation and equal rights were given priority in the international community after World War II, the momentum of which came after the establishment of the United Nations. In the global perspective, women empowerment is considered important for equality, human rights, development, peace and security. A search team named 'Women in Development' was established in the United Nations in 1973. The Development Fund for Women was established by the United Nations in 1976 and the decade from 1975 to 1985 was celebrated as the 'Women's Decade'. At the 2005 World Conference of Presidents of States and Governments in the United Nations, it was accepted at the United Nations that 'the advancement of women is the advancement of all'. The eight goals set for the Millennium Development in 2000 include gender equality and women empowerment. For women, participation in education, employment and political decision-making process is considered important.

As a result of the efforts of the United Nations, a number of programmes have been organized in all countries to ensure their participation in the development process by eliminating all types of discrimination against women in the last six-plus decades. As a result of these international efforts, many policies, programmes and laws were enacted in all countries of the world including India to provide women equal opportunities vis-a-vis men. In India, after the decade of women, there has also been a sudden increase in studies of gender equality and women empowerment. Today, a lot of priority is being given to the study of these two. The fact that gender equality and women empowerment are closely interrelated is very remarkable. On one hand, women empowerment is the foundation of gender equality, on the other hand, women empowerment is possible only through gender equality.

## **2. The Present Study**

The spread of education in India, industrialization, urbanization, westernization, modernization, secularization, geographical and social mobility led to the emergence of new economic structures and market systems. Now, globalization, liberalization and privatization have led to a significant changes in

the quality of life of women. As a result, women have started working alongside men in almost every sphere of life. The result of this is that today the status, role and scenario of women are changing. Of course, the status and role of women has improved a lot today. Not only this, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, several programmes have also been started for the upliftment and empowerment of women in India. These include Maternal and Child Health Programme (1992), Kishori Balika Yojana (1992), Mahila Samridhi Yojana (1993), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh Yojana (1993), National Maternity Benefit Scheme (1994), providing self-support to rural and urban women, Indira Sakhi Yojana (1997), Balika Samridhi Yojana (1997), Women Empowerment through Self Help Groups (1997), etc. There are other notable schemes such as the Nari Swashakti Yojana (1998) and the Nari Shakti Puraskar Yojana (2000) to encourage women with national awards who are fighting for the rights of women.

Similarly, in order to protect the various rights of women, the government has enacted several laws related to women with special reference to them. Such laws include the Minimum Wages Act, 1979; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (revised again in 1956); Maternity Benefit Act 1961; Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 (Amendment, 1986); The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; The Pre-natal Diagnostic Technology Act, 1994 and the Domestic Violence [Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are the main ones. It is a combined result of the processes of change, programmes and acts initiated for the upliftment and empowerment of women that not only the status and role of women has improved in India, but their life values and norms are also changing rapidly. Due to the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology in society, traditional concepts related to the role and status of women in India are gradually changing. This change is happening more in urban women than in rural women.

The movement for women's development and gender equality in economic activities has resulted in far-reaching changes in the traditional Indian social structure. Due to this, in the Indian traditional environment, the work area of women was limited to the boundaries of the household, it has also changed and today women are moving towards the goal of 'women empowerment' continuously through education and employment. For working women, both the duties of the family and the responsibility of the

workplace are desirable. Of course, working women naturally have to bear additional responsibilities. Their thoughts and attitudes are changing.

There is also another aspect of change in the status, role and context of women. Even today, women lag behind men in terms of education, health and other basic facilities. The mind-set of considering them as *abla* has not been completely eliminated, as a result of which discrimination and violence against them is increasing rather than decreasing. The studies conducted in the last few years at the international and national level clearly show that not only is gender equality still a distant goal, but violence towards women is also increasing all over the world.<sup>1</sup> The worst thing is that educated and employed women are also falling prey to it. They are unable to complain of domestic violence even if they want to.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the issue of women improved in India still remains a controversial subject. Despite the national policy of women empowerment and all other measures, even today the success of women empowerment has not been as successful as expected. It is true that increasing education, employment, increase in income, awareness, understanding of rights and obligations among women etc. are making further progress towards women empowerment. However, even today they are facing many obstacles which hinder their empowerment.

In such a situation it becomes necessary to explore the situation. The present study has been planned for this purpose. Its objective is to evaluate various consequences of empowerment among working women in a metropolis like Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state. The main objective of the present study is to discuss in a holistic manner the empowerment of women working in the higher education sector *i.e.*, colleges in Meerut metropolis based on empirical analysis. The specific objectives of this study are : *firstly*, to explore the impact of empowerment among working women on their status and role, gender equality and social values and *secondly*, to give suggestions for the empowerment of working women.

### **3. Methodology**

The area of present research the Meerut Metropolis of Uttar Pradesh. Due to the increasing dissemination of education, it is considered to be an educational hub which has facilities to cater to

the needs of all types of higher education seekers. Working women have been selected from teachers at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. The university was formed in 1966 and has colleges located in seven districts - Meerut, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Gautam Budh Nagar and Ghaziabad. Universe is teachers of nine colleges (Meerut College, Nanakchand Anglo Sanskrit College, Raghunath Girls College, Ismail National Women's College, D. N. College, Kanoharlal College, Shaheed Mangal Pandey Government Women's College, Dr. Ambedkar College and Faize-Aam College) in 2015-16. Out of about 400 teachers in these nine colleges, 50 percent, *i.e.* about 200 teachers have been selected by random sampling. A coordinated approach of pre-structured questionnaire and informal interview have been adopted to study empowerment in working women. The data compiled by the pre-structured questionnaire have been processed under SPSS. The secondary data were qualitatively analyzed. Statistically, only the chi-square has been used to find association between two variables.

From the socio-economic background of the selected women, it is clear that women working in higher education form a homogeneous category to a great extent in terms of level of education and employment, whereas in terms of all other variables, they are quite heterogeneous. Selected women represent the married and unmarried categories of all age groups. Considerable diversity is found in selected women in terms of family type and size, parents' education and occupation, their own and family monthly income, caste category, religious and community background. It is clear that our study is, to a large extent, representing teachers of a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion about the Impact of Empowerment among Women**

Empowerment is defined as an active and multi-dimensional process that emphasizes women in all spheres to build their identity and equal participation in power. This power has to be attained and once attained it is not only necessary to maintain it but it is equally important to use it. Empowerment of women means broadening options for them. These options include the choice of when to marry or not to marry, the option of education and employment, the control

over social and physical environment, when to become pregnant or not, and ultimately the size of the family. Empowerment is the belief that husbands, partners, families and communities help to promote a healthy environment that is free from violence or mistreatment towards them and provides them free and equal participation in community services. Its ultimate goal is to develop the ability of women to gain control over personal, social, economic and political resources.

The aim of women empowerment is to bring gender equality in the society and provide all the rights available to women as to men. Gender equality is not possible without a change in the traditional status and role of women. If education and employment opportunities will not be available to women, their participation in the decision-making process at the level of family, community and nation will not increase, they will not move from conservatism to modernity and their values regarding contemporary issues and problems will not change, till then we cannot even think of gender equality. We have focused on these dimensions to find the results of women empowerment.

#### **4.1 Consequences of Empowerment on their Status and Role**

The results related to the consequences of empowerment on status and role of women in this study are as follows:

1. Almost all the selected women (90.0 percent) have agreed that their traditional status has improved. The proportion of women expressing consent increases with increasing levels of empowerment in them.
2. Traditionally, women have been considered weak (*abla*). Empirical data confirmed the fact that their perception has not yet changed significantly as more than half (51.5 percent) of women have agreed to it. More than two-thirds (68.0 percent) of the 79 women who disagree with this have high levels of empowerment.
3. Traditionally, the role of women in Indian society has been limited to the boundaries of the household. Empirical data showed that there has been a lot of change in this because 93.0 percent of the selected women have disagreed with it. About two-thirds (64.0 percent) of such women have high levels of empowerment.



4. Men and women were not considered equal for all types of work due to biological basis and gender discrimination. According to empirical data, except 10 women, all the others (95.0 percent) have agreed that now women are not behind men in doing any work. About two-thirds (64.2 percent) of women who believed in this, have high levels of empowerment.
5. Education and employment are considered as interrelated but important factors that change the status and role of women. This is corroborated by empirical data because except only 4 all other women (98.00%) have agreed that education and employment have significantly changed their status and role. Nearly two-thirds (63.3 percent) of such women have high levels of empowerment.
6. Traditionally, participation of women in family and other decisions has been negligible in Indian society. Empirical data suggested that there is no longer such a situation as almost all (91.5 percent) except 14 women have accepted the fact that women are now consulted in family and other decisions. A little less than two-thirds (61.7 percent) of such women have high level of empowerment.
7. Empirical data revealed that there has been no significant change in the tendency of men to provide support in kitchen and other domestic works despite the empowerment of women as only more than one-fourth (29.5 percent) have accepted this type of support provided by men. Most of them were married women from nuclear families and opined that it was not possible to do all domestic work without husband's help.

In conclusion, it can be said that empowerment is important in influencing the status and role of working women. But the fact remains that education and employment also have an important role in this change which is above their level of empowerment. Empowerment is only a catalyst for such changes.

#### **4.2 Consequences of Empowerment on Gender Equality**

It is also believed that one of the consequences of women empowerment of women is their modernization. Although this is not confirmed statistically by the calculated value of the chi-square, empirical data suggested that only slightly less than two-thirds (62.1 percent) of women with high level of empowerment had high levels

of modernization. Since most of the women are empowered, it seems that their modernization has been accelerated done by education and employment ignoring the differences in their level of empowerment.

The issue of gender equality is intimately related to women's empowerment. The goal of empowerment in all countries is to bring gender equality. For gender equality, it is necessary to change the patriarchal values, perceptions and behavior which impede it. It is true that as a patriarchal society, this ideology has deep roots in our society, however in the modern era it is also a fact that it is undergoing rapid changes. The facts revealed about consequences of empowerment on gender equality are as follows :

1. More than half (56.5 percent) of the selected women agreed that empowerment made the husband's behavior in the family as equal. If the unmarried women are excluded, then this ratio became more than three-fourths (86.9 percent). Nearly two-thirds (65.5 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment.
2. Similarly, more than half (59.5 percent) of the selected women also agreed that empowerment made the behavior equal of all family members. More than two-thirds (67.2 percent) of women who believed in this, had high level of empowerment.
3. More than three-fourths (82.5 percent) of the selected women confirmed the view that children of empowered women considered their parents as equal. A little less than two-third (61.2 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment.
4. More than three-quarters (77.0 percent) of selected women denied that women are still not treated as equal to men in most services. Slightly less than two-thirds (62.3 percent) of the women in this category had high level of empowerment.
5. Except for only 6 women, everyone else (97.0 percent) agreed that empowered women should not undergo sex determination tests during pregnancy as there is no difference between boy and girl now. Of these, less than two-thirds (62.9 percent) of women had high level of empowerment.
6. Nearly three-fourths (74.5 percent) of selected women did not accept that empowered women are also victims of domestic violence. More than half (57.7 percent) of women who believed in this, had high level of empowerment.



7. More than three-fourths (81.0 percent) of the selected women denied any discrimination in the family between women and men (girls and boys). A little less than two-thirds (63.6 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment.
8. More than three-quarters (89.0 percent) of selected women denied any gender-based socialization in their families. A little less than two-thirds (62.9 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment.
9. About three-fourths (74.5 per cent) of the women denied any discrimination between women and men in their colleges. Nearly two-thirds (65.1 percent) of these women had high level of empowerment.

On the basis of the above facts, it can be concluded that empowerment is an important agency to bring gender equality. But it is noteworthy in this context that gender equality also increases with education and employment. Empowerment plays the role of motivator. In fact, education, employment and empowerment give women the courage to challenge patriarchal ideology and values. That is why they take quite a different view about many behavioral practices and values which had been prevalent in their parents' generation.

#### **4.3 Consequences of Empowerment on Change in Social Values**

In a series of finding the consequences of empowerment, we have finally analyzed the changes in the social values of working women on some current issues. In this context, the results that have come out from empirical facts are as follows :

1. Less than three-fourths (72.0 percent) of the selected women have changed significantly in moral values. About two-thirds (64.6 percent) of women with extreme change have high level of empowerment. According to them, reservation was not only mandatory for women in the Lok Sabha/state legislatures, but it is also necessary to abolish the double standards of morality related to women and men to bring cleanliness in political life.
2. Similarly, the caste-related values of less than three-fourths (71.0 percent) selected women have also changed drastically. About two-thirds (64.6 percent) of the women in this category had high level of empowerment. They were not in favour of behaving on the basis of traditional caste traits.

3. Empirical data about views on marriage values showed that more than three-fourths (85.5 percent) of selected women had undergone radical changes. Less than two-thirds (61.4 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment. They were in favour of giving children more freedom in many issues like choosing their life partner, opposing dowry, recognizing widow remarriage etc.
4. Not only from the point of view of matrimonial beliefs, but also another aspect related to it, *i.e.* change in dowry values also seemed to be affected by education, employment and empowerment of the selected women. Empirical data showed that three-fourths (74.5 percent) of selected women had undergone a great change in dowry-related values. In this too, more than half (57.7 percent) of women have high level of empowerment. They considered the bride itself as a dowry, not marrying dowry greeders, and favoured death/life imprisonment for dowry murders.
5. In terms of religious values, rituals and customs, more than three-fourths (82.5 per cent) of the selected women had changed drastically and less than two-thirds (61.8 per cent) of the women had high level of empowerment. They favoured not to consider marriage as a religious rite, to reject double standards related to the re-remarriage of widows, to abandon notions of purity-pollution related to kitchen works, and to oppose religious fundamentalism. The above analysis of the changes resulting from empowerment in selected women reaffirmed the fact that women empowerment can play a positive role in Indian society. Empowerment appears to play a role of intermediate factor both directly and in terms of education and employment.
6. The role of education, employment and empowerment cannot be denied even for changes in family values of selected women. More than three-quarters (84.5 percent) of the selected women had seen a lot of change in their family values. A little less than two-thirds (62.1 percent) of such women had high level of empowerment. It seems that they are not in favour of maintaining the traditional beliefs prevailing in the joint family which promote gender discrimination and have resulted in backwardness of women in Indian society.

Selected women are undergoing extreme changes about the major issues of society. This change is not just the result of empowerment. It seems that education and employment are encouraging this change even without empowerment. Hence, sometimes empowerment becomes a variable called intermediate variable. Empowerment comes from the factors that are conducive to it, empowerment improves the status and role of women, promotes modernization, gender equality and changes regarding various contemporary issues. This is a model. The second model is to directly improve the status and role of women through education, employment and other variables, promote modernization, gender equality and change about various issues. It seems that both models are functional in this study.

## **5. Suggestions for Empowerment of Women**

The concept of women empowerment is believed to have originated from the International Women's Conference, Nairobi (1985). In all the conferences for women empowerment at the international level, several resolutions have been passed to achieve this goal. India is not only one of the countries to accept and adopt these proposals, but has also formulated a national policy for women empowerment at the national level in 2001, which aims to strive for gender equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution, to remove the barriers to empowerment and to provide special facilities for the upliftment of women so that they lead a respectable life. After evaluating this policy, the present government has also prepared a draft in 2016, which has tried to overcome the shortcomings of the policy.

The objectives of the National Policy for Women, 2016 include providing a socio-cultural, economic and political environment for women to develop their full potential and live in accordance with their fundamental rights; accelerate efforts for the achievement of women's education, health and other basic facilities; ensuring their participation at all levels of the decision-making process; establishing a gender-sensitive legal-judicial system; and to expedite efforts to end all forms of violence against women. Health, education, poverty alleviation, service sector reforms have been placed on priority issues. Ensuring their participation at all levels of self-governance and decision making and ending violence against women is also a priority area.

Based on the experience of present research, the following suggestions can be made to achieve the goal of women's empowerment in India :

1. Since most of the selected women are empowered as teachers of colleges, mandatory steps should be taken to bring its full benefits to the students. The subject of 'women empowerment' should be included in the curriculum of undergraduate and postgraduate level in sociology. Emphasis should be given on education making boys and girls sensitive to gender in colleges by educational and non-academic activities. This will not only promote values of gender equality, but will also give boys and girls the courage to think deeply about such issues and overcome the obstacles that are affecting the pace of women's development and empowerment.
2. There is a need to motivate the victims to eradicate evils like feticide and female infanticide, dowry, gender bias, child marriage, all kinds of violence towards women etc. through education. If they will understand the harm done to society by them, then they will definitely give their cooperation in the governmental and non-governmental efforts to eliminate them.
3. There is a need to prioritize the education of girls who have been deprived of equal opportunities in education. One should try to explain the importance of women's education in every community through street plays. As much as possible, the efforts should be made to explain the importance of the slogan of UNESCO that 'To educate a man is to educate only one man, while educating a woman is to educate the whole family' to reach the masses and Swami Vivekananda's words that 'Unless the conditions of women improve, till then there is no opportunity for the welfare of the world. It is not possible to fly for a bird with only one wing'. Education is a powerful medium for transformation and is helpful in bringing about women empowerment.
4. On the one hand, there is a need to encourage female education, while on the other hand, men also need to be sensitized towards them. Cultural values propagate the importance of male prominence. This tendency is weakened by sex sensitization. Communication media and inter-personal communication can be used to achieve this goal.

5. Priority should be given to women's health and survival programs. Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women are showing their abilities in all walks of life. Physically healthy women can properly face the challenges of equality. Non-governmental organizations should also be enlisted to achieve this goal.
6. Necessary steps need to be taken to encourage economic participation of women. Women capable of economic independence are self-supporting. Policies should be made more effective to reduce the gap of economic participation in women and men in rural and urban areas.
7. Legal provisions should be strictly enforced to prevent discrimination and violence against women. Practices like sex determination tests can be curbed only by effective laws.
8. Specific programs should be launched to make women aware of their rights. Poor, uneducated and untrained women become victims of exploitation easily. Therefore, special attention needs to be paid to such women. Media of mass communication also need to be used to achieve this objective.
9. The provisions of the National Policy on the Empowerment of Women need to be implemented in a sincere and effective manner.
10. Necessary steps should be taken for maximum access of women to all available resources. It is necessary for women's freedom. The more rights women have over resources, the more powerful they will be. Till now, women are far behind men in terms of access to resources, not only in India but all over the world.
11. Women should be given complete freedom of movement. According to the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06), one-third of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are free to go out of the house alone. In such a situation, how women's empowerment can happen?
12. Along with greater opportunities for control over resources, women should also have control over their earnings. This helps them to have maximum control over their life, body and environment which is necessary for their empowerment.
13. There is a need to increase female participation in family decisions. If they remain neglected in the family, how will they

get respect in the community and society? With this, they will think properly about their health, big family expenses and family members as well as relatives.

14. Women's empowerment is also encouraged by controlling all forms of domestic violence. When family members continue to beat them as unbecoming, it is not possible for them to get justice even outside the family.
15. There is a need to take steps for political participation in women. They have one-third reservation at the local level, but their representation in the Lok Sabha/State Legislatures is very less. One-third reservation at the local level has certainly made a significant change in the dimensions of female leadership. Although they are entitled to 50 percent reservation, but if one-third of the reservation in Parliament and State Legislatures is provided for them, then it will definitely prove to be a milestone. The 108<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment related to women's reservation has not been passed yet. Therefore, there is a need to find an immediate solution in this direction to form a consensus and pass it.
16. There is a need to take drastic steps for female capacity development. Capacity development enhances leadership qualities in them and increases awareness of their rights. This needs special attention by modern technology and training.
17. There is a need to strengthen women's self-help groups and community-based women organizations. Such groups and organizations can play an important role in developing the capacity of women and providing them employment.
18. Media of mass communication should be used for women empowerment. In the last few decades, television has become an important medium not only for entertainment but also for education. There is a need to broadcast such programs that make women aware of their rights and help reduce gender discrimination. There is a need to curb the serials that promote patriarchal ideology.
19. The Ministry of Women and Child Development should implement the programmes promoting women empowerment with full devotion. From time to time, the facilities given to women should be evaluated and steps should be taken to eliminate deficiencies.



20. Women should provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to move forward on the basis of egalitarian values in place of socialization based on gender discrimination in their families. There should be special training programmes for rural women to make them aware about gender sensitization.

The above suggestions can definitely trigger the process of women's empowerment. Not only this, implementing these suggestions is also not a difficult task.

## **6. Conclusion**

Today, efforts for women's empowerment have gained immense momentum all over the world. At the international level, the United Nations continues to issue guidelines from time to time based on consensus in various conferences. Governments of various countries also try to move forward not only on the basis of these guidelines, but also strive to achieve the goal of women empowerment by taking statutory and other necessary steps keeping in view their socio-cultural background. This goal is not possible to achieve only by the steps taken by the government. For this, the woman herself has to find solutions to all her problems alone and collectively which is a hindrance in the path of her empowerment. No one can get anyone's rights automatically. One has to take his rights and protect himself. It also has to be remembered that empowerment is not intended to reduce the rights of men in any form. This is to empower women with all the rights that will help them achieve equal status as men in society.

Being a multi-dimensional process, empowerment is making women realize their full potential, identity and power in all walks of life. This allows them to gain access to resources and knowledge, to have greater participation and freedom in the decision making process, to plan their lives well, to control situations affecting their lives, and to gain freedom from the values imposed by patriarchal ideology. The decisive role of women empowerment is coming out to make them aware of their rights and duties and to improve their status and role.

We should not forget that patriarchal values have deep roots in Indian society and they are not going to be completely crumbled easily. Nevertheless, empirical data collected for this research confirm the fact that women empowerment is helping to transform

the traditional landscape and reduce gender gaps. There is a need to formulate an action plan in which more and more women, especially educated and working women, are included in the economically active role. It is now an undisputed and empirical fact that education and employment is an effective tool for women's empowerment. By encouraging this, we can definitely achieve the goal of gender equality in India.

Women should start this work from their own families. Mothers have an important role in socialization. Therefore, they should not encourage gender-based socialization in the families and provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to move forward on the basis of egalitarian values. Now, it is not the time to consider them as weak (*Abla*) and alien property (*Praya dhan*). *Instead*, the girls should be given equal opportunities as are available to boys. Several sociological studies reveal the fact that even after marriage, girls are more attached to their parents, more concerned about their problems and health than their brothers. Studies in metros like Delhi reflect the fact that many women (daughters-in-law) are responsible for maltreating the elderly. If there will be socialization in the family on the basis of egalitarian values and efforts will be made to achieve the goal of women empowerment by encouraging the internalization of these values, then these kinds of problems probably will not develop.

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