



ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECISION MAKING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The place and importance of women in India is a topic of great significance, as it encompasses their multifaceted roles, contributions, and challenges faced in various aspects of society. From the past, women have been celebrated for their wisdom, strength, and resilience. The journey of women in India has not been without its challenges. The deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset has often relegated women to subordinate roles, limiting their opportunities for growth and development. Practices such as dowry, child marriage, and female infanticide have long persisted in various parts of the country, causing immense suffering and injustice to countless women. Many Non-Governmental Organisation has working for them by conducting different empowerment related activities. This paper tries to understand the Role of the NGOs for women empowerment by decision making. In order to fully understand the paper, qualitative research methodology has been utilised in conjunction with rich secondary sources, including carefully chosen academic papers, to assess the role of NGOs in empowering women by decision making.

1. INTRODUCTION

'Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world.'

-----Hillary Clinton

India, a diverse and vibrant nation with a rich cultural heritage and a history that spans thousands of years, has been home to some of the world's most influential women leaders, thinkers, and trailblazers. The place and importance of women in India is a topic of great significance, as it encompasses their multifaceted roles, contributions, and challenges faced in various aspects of society. From ancient times, when women were revered as goddesses and held positions of power, to the present day, when they continue to break barriers and redefine societal norms, women have played an integral role in shaping the country's social, economic, and political landscape.

Throughout Indian history, women have been celebrated for their wisdom, strength, and resilience. Ancient scriptures and texts like the Rig Veda, Mahabharata, and Ramayana contain numerous references to powerful female figures such as Sita, Draupadi, and Savitri. These women demonstrated courage, intelligence, and determination in the face of adversity, serving as inspiring role models for generations to come. Moreover, the concept of 'Shakti,' the divine feminine energy, further underscores the importance of women in India's spiritual and philosophical traditions.

In addition to their historical and spiritual significance, women in India have made invaluable contributions to the fields of art,

literature, science, and education. Renowned female poets like Mirabai and Andal, classical dancers like Rukmini Devi Arundale, and pioneering scientists like Anandi Gopal Joshi and Kalpana Chawla have left indelible marks on India's cultural and intellectual fabric. These women have defied stereotypes and shattered glass ceilings, proving that gender should never be a barrier to success and accomplishment.

However, the journey of women in India has not been without its challenges. The deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset has often relegated women to subordinate roles, limiting their opportunities for growth and development. Practices such as dowry, child marriage, and female infanticide have long persisted in various parts of the country, causing immense suffering and injustice to countless women. Furthermore, disparities in access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities have further exacerbated gender inequality in India. Gender stereotyping further exacerbates the issue by reinforcing traditional roles and expectations that limit women's opportunities for growth and development. Women are frequently expected to prioritize their domestic responsibilities over their personal ambitions and career aspirations, leading to economic dependency and restricted access to resources. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes not only hinders women's progress but also undermines the potential for achieving an equitable and inclusive society.

That's why, the pressing need for women empowerment in India stems from the recognition that addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the well-being and dignity of



every woman. Kofi Annan rightly said that, 'There is no tool for development more effective than empowerment of women'.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To recognise the increasing the violence against the women and gender inequality, this paper try to understand the role of Non-Government Organisations for women empowerment through decision making.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The paper reveals the functioning role of the NGOs working in India. In order to fully understand the paper, qualitative research methodology has been utilised in conjunction with rich secondary sources, including carefully chosen academic papers, to assess the role of NGOs in empowering women by decision making.

4. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to have control over their lives, make their own decisions, and access equal opportunities in various spheres, including education, employment, healthcare, and participation in social and political activities. It involves dismantling gender-based discrimination, challenging patriarchal norms, and ensuring gender equality. The concept of women empowerment recognizes the historical and ongoing marginalization, discrimination, and oppression faced by women in societies worldwide. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these issues to create a more equitable and just society. Its genuine attempt to transform women "from victim to survivor... to active citizen" is successful. According to **Kabeer (1999)**. Women empowerment is a method through which people attain the ability to acquire strategic life which they have been denied earlier. In order to successfully better their lives and secure their livelihood, women engage in a process that challenges cultural conventions that promotes the women empowerment (**Swain, 2006**).

5. DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Woman empowerment is a multidimensional process that aims to uplift the status of women by addressing various aspects of their lives. The key aspects of women empowerment include:

1) Quality Education

One of the most critical aspects of women empowerment is access to quality education for girls. Recognizing the importance of education as a catalyst for change, the Indian government has introduced several policies and schemes to enhance educational opportunities for girls. Initiatives like the **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** campaign emphasize the importance of educating daughters while simultaneously working to curb female infanticide and gender discrimination. Scholarships and financial incentives are also provided to encourage girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education, thus breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

2) Economic Independence

Economic empowerment is another vital component of women empowerment in India. By providing women with the skills, resources, and opportunities to achieve financial independence, they can break free from the shackles of dependency and gain greater control over their lives. Programs like the **Mahila E-Haat, Mudra Yojana, and Stand Up India scheme** offer financial assistance, skill development training, and entrepreneurship opportunities to help women establish their businesses and contribute to the nation's economic growth. Moreover, the promotion of self-help groups and microfinance institutions has enabled countless women in rural areas to access credit and support networks, empowering them to overcome poverty and improve their living conditions.

3) Political Representation

Political representation is an essential aspect of women empowerment, as it ensures that women's voices are heard, and their concerns are addressed in the decision-making process. In India, quotas and reservations have been implemented at various levels of governance, including the **Panchayati Raj Institutions**, to increase women's participation in politics. While progress has been made in this regard, efforts to further enhance women's representation at the state and national levels must continue in order to achieve a more balanced and inclusive political landscape.

4) Social Awareness

Social awareness campaigns play a crucial role in challenging traditional gender norms and promoting a more egalitarian mindset. Initiatives like **HeForShe and Men Engage**, which involve men as allies in the fight for gender equality, have gained momentum in recent years. These campaigns aim to foster a sense of shared responsibility and encourage men to actively support women's empowerment by challenging patriarchal attitudes and behaviours

5) Health and Well-being

Access to quality healthcare, including reproductive health services, is an essential aspect of women empowerment. Healthy and well-informed women can make better choices regarding their bodies and lives, contributing to the overall well-being of their families and communities.

6) Legal Rights and Protection

Ensuring that women are aware of their legal rights and have access to justice is vital for empowerment. This includes protection against domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination, as well as equal inheritance and property rights.

7) Safety and Security

Ensuring a safe environment for women, both in public and private spaces, is an important aspect of empowerment. This involves addressing issues such as gender-based violence, trafficking, and harassment, and creating support systems for survivors.

8) Access to Resources

Empowering women requires that they have equal access to resources such as land, water, technology, and information. These resources are crucial for their socio-economic development and enable them to contribute effectively to their families and communities.



9) Networking and Community Building

Encouraging women to form networks and engage in collective action can amplify their voices and strengthen their bargaining power. Self-help groups, cooperatives, and women's organizations play a significant role in fostering solidarity and collaboration among women.

10) Leadership and Confidence Building

Developing women's leadership skills and self-confidence is essential for their empowerment. This can be achieved through capacity-building programs, mentorship, and exposure to inspiring role models.

6. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Indian government has been proactive in implementing several initiatives and schemes aimed at promoting women empowerment and addressing the challenges faced by women across various aspects of their lives. Key initiatives such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* campaign focus on improving the child sex ratio, promoting girls' education, and challenging gender discrimination. The *Mahila Shakti Kendra* initiative seeks to empower rural women through community participation and awareness generation, while the *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana* encourages parents to save for their daughters' education and marriage expenses through a government-backed savings scheme. To support women entrepreneurs, the government launched the *Mahila E-Haat*, an online marketing platform, and the *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana*, which offers financial assistance to small businesses, including those led by women. The *Ujjwala Scheme* addresses the health and well-being of women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households by providing free LPG connections, reducing indoor air pollution caused by traditional cooking methods.

Additionally, the government has set up One Stop Centre Scheme or *Sakhi Centres* to offer integrated support services to women affected by violence, and the Swadhar Greh initiative provides shelter and rehabilitation services to women in distress. To support working mothers, the National Creche Scheme offers daycare facilities for young children, and the Mahila Police Volunteer initiative involves recruiting women volunteers to act as a bridge between the police and the community, helping create awareness about women's rights and reporting incidents of violence. These government initiatives, along with numerous others, demonstrate India's commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women and fostering their empowerment across various spheres of life.

7. LIMITATION AND CHALLENGES OF GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Indian government's efforts to promote women empowerment have faced several challenges, hindering their complete success. Deep-rooted cultural and social norms, such as patriarchal beliefs and gender stereotypes, continue to perpetuate discrimination against women and undermine their opportunities. Lack of awareness about rights and government schemes among women, particularly in rural areas, prevents them from accessing available benefits. Implementation challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption,

and inadequate resources, hinder the effective execution of government initiatives at the grassroots level. Insufficient funding and a fragmented approach to implementing various programs dilute their overall effectiveness. Additionally, limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms impede the assessment of the initiatives' impact, while resistance from conservative communities and inadequate access to justice for women facing discrimination or violence further complicate the situation. Kofi Annan (2018) said "*Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.*" To address these challenges, a comprehensive and long-term approach involving the government, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector is required.

8. NGO AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is a non-profit, voluntary group or institution that operates independently of the government and addresses various social, environmental, or humanitarian issues. NGOs play a crucial role in promoting development, advocating for human rights (Dutta, 2020), providing relief during emergencies, and raising awareness about various global and local problems.

NGOs serve as an alternative for women empowerment by supplementing government efforts and addressing specific needs that may not be met by public programs alone (Gupta, 2021). Their flexibility, grassroots connections, and expertise in specialized areas can make a significant impact on empowering women. These organizations offer innovative and grassroots approaches to address the gender inequalities and challenges that women face. NGOs play a crucial role in providing educational opportunities, economic empowerment, healthcare access, and advocacy for women's rights. They design and implement programs tailored to the specific needs and contexts of women, engaging directly with communities to create lasting change. By focusing on capacity-building, mentorship, and creating safe spaces, NGOs empower women to challenge social norms, develop leadership skills, and become agents of change within their communities. NGOs also serve as a platform for raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, and collaborating with various stakeholders to amplify their impact. Through their dedication and commitment, NGOs offer a viable alternative for women's empowerment, fostering gender equality and creating opportunities for women to thrive and reach their full potential.

9. NGO'S ROLE FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECISION MAKING

NGOs in India have played a pivotal role in advancing women's empowerment through their various initiatives. For instance, organizations like SEWA have been instrumental in enabling women in the informal sector to gain decision-making power over their economic activities. By organizing women into self-help groups and cooperatives, SEWA provides them with a platform to collectively make decisions regarding their finances, access to credit, and overall livelihoods. This empowers women by giving them a voice in shaping their



economic destinies and enables them to challenge traditional gender roles.

In a similar vein, the *Centre for Social Research (CSR)* has taken proactive steps to enhance women's decision-making abilities through leadership training workshops and political empowerment initiatives. By equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge, CSR enables them to actively participate in local governance and decision-making bodies. This not only fosters a sense of agency and self-confidence among women but also contributes to the overall democratization of decision-making processes at the grassroots level.

NGOs such as Breakthrough focus on addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's decision-making power. Through their innovative media campaigns, community engagement activities, and leadership development workshops, they challenge gender norms and empower women to become decision-makers in their communities. By actively involving women in decision-making, Breakthrough enables them to advocate for their rights, influence policy changes, and contribute to creating safer and more equitable societies.

Furthermore, organizations like *Women on Wings* collaborate with social enterprises in rural areas to create employment opportunities for women. By actively involving women in decision-making processes related to business activities, Women on Wings empowers them economically and socially. Through business mentoring, training, and support, women entrepreneurs gain the skills and knowledge required to make strategic decisions that contribute to the growth and sustainability of their enterprises. This not only enhances their economic independence but also empowers them to challenge gender stereotypes and break through traditional barriers.

NGOs like The *Hunger Project and Pradan* focus on rural development and poverty alleviation. Through their programs, they empower marginalized women by enhancing their decision-making abilities and leadership skills. By facilitating the formation of women's self-help groups and providing them with access to credit and livelihood opportunities, these organizations enable women to participate in decision-making processes related to community development and resource allocation. This active involvement empowers women to influence decisions that impact their lives and communities positively.

NGOs such as *Jagori* work towards creating safe and empowering spaces for women to participate in decision-making. Through training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns, Jagori promotes women's leadership and decision-making in various domains, including politics, education, and community development. By breaking down societal barriers and challenging gender biases, Jagori enables women to exercise their agency, voice their opinions, and actively shape policies and decisions that affect them.

10. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECISION MAKING

Women empowerment through decision making is crucial for the progress and development of any society. When women are given the opportunity to make decisions, they can contribute to the growth of their families, communities, and nations.

Firstly, when women are empowered to make decisions, they can contribute to the economic growth of their families and communities. Women who have control over their finances can invest in their children's education and health, which can lead to better outcomes for their families. Additionally, when women are involved in decision-making processes at work, they can bring new perspectives and ideas that can lead to innovation and growth.

Secondly, women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to better policies that address the needs of all members of society. Women have unique experiences and perspectives that can inform policies related to education, healthcare, and social welfare. When women are included in decision-making processes, policies are more likely to be inclusive and effective.

Thirdly, empowering women through decision making can lead to greater gender equality. When women have a voice in decision-making processes, they are more likely to advocate for policies that promote gender equality. This can lead to greater opportunities for women in education, employment, and leadership positions.

Finally, empowering women through decision making is a fundamental human right. Women have the right to participate in all aspects of society on an equal basis with men. When women are excluded from decision-making processes, their rights are violated. In conclusion, empowering women through decision making is essential for the progress and development of any society. Women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to economic growth, better policies, greater gender equality, and the protection of human rights. It is essential that we work towards creating a world where all women have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

11. CONCLUSION

The journey towards women empowerment in India has yielded numerous positive outcomes, including increased access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for women, as well as a greater awareness of their rights and entitlements. Feminist ideology is held by empowered women, and they want to see other oppressed women gain power. These strong women will be able to realise their convictions by joining forces with an NGO whose goals are similar to their own, which provides them a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment (*Narumugai & Kumar, 2017*). The movement for women empowerment in India has come a long way, but there is still much work to be done. Continued commitment and collaboration among all stakeholders are essential to sustain the gains made thus far and pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive. By empowering women, India not only fulfils its moral



obligation towards half of its population but also unlocks the immense potential that lies within its women, thereby fostering sustainable development and social progress for all. NGO's work has significantly advanced the cause of ending gender inequality and empowering women. To achieve sustained and all-encompassing women's empowerment projects, issues including financial limitations and cultural hurdles need constant attention and collaboration. NGOs may continue to influence good change and build a more inclusive and equitable society for women through continuous dedication and effective partnerships.

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