

Unveiling The Dynamics of Women's Empowerment: An In-Depth Critical Review

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Abstract

Empowerment of women for development is a crucial step towards actualizing sustainable development. The present paper brings a systematic literature review of women's empowerment that involves an analysis of women's empowerment in general, worldwide and in India. The analyzed literature was divided into international literature and Indian literature based on the subject area, and then authors and articles were systematically reviewed to draw out similarities in the findings. This review reveals that women have a higher societal status in traditional domains of work in developing countries. However, they need to be empowered more in terms of decision-making, and hence, they should focus on awareness and capacity building. In India, political reservations for women have positive impacts regarding women's political representation, particularly in the decision-making process of the state; however, problems like violence against women and the problem of weakness in policy representation still arise frequently. The results outlined economic, educational, and political participation as significant elements for promoting gender equality. The review highlights the necessity of establishing multiple, high-quality indices that reflect all facets of empowerment while underlining the need to conduct research that would be most relevant for particular cultural contexts. In the future, there must be more prospective research on a combination of gender, the effects of the use of technology, and the involvement of male peasants in the betterment of gender equity. Since these areas are addressed, researchers and policymakers can develop insights into women's rights, drawing on more positive, efficient, and enduring efforts to advance women. This work shall examine the current state of women empowered in India from a human rights perspective, relying on attributes like control over household decisions, level of economic independence, mobility, voting rights, tolerability of gender inequality, media interaction, education, and experience of physical violations. These research outcomes fill the literature gap, contributing to the agenda on gender equality with a practical understanding of the situation in India and presenting directions for further development.

Keywords: women empowerment; women; India; Global; review.

Introduction

Over the past fifty years, the idea of women's empowerment has significantly evolved from focusing on providing welfare to achieving equality. It is commonly defined as the mechanism by which individuals with little power acquire increased authority over the conditions of their existence. Empowerment specifically encompasses the ability to exercise authority over both resources and ideology. Sen and Batliwala (2000) argue that engaging in this activity results in an increasing inherent capacity, enhanced self-assurance, and a profound change in one's awareness that empowers one to overcome external obstacles. This perspective primarily focuses on two crucial characteristics. First and foremost, power is the ability to accomplish desired objectives rather than exerting control over others. Furthermore, empowerment is particularly relevant to individuals or groups who lack authority, regardless of gender, or their membership in a specific social class or caste. While empowerment is not exclusive to women, it is distinct in that it transcends social classes and castes and even extends to families and households (Malhotra et al., 2002). Women's empowerment also refers to lobbying individuals or groups to strengthen their ability to accomplish their desired goals and change them into achievable plans and competent outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). The main dimensions related to empowerment involve economic, social, political, and psychological domains and aim to increase women's capability to control resources, decision-making power and other aspects of their lives. Today, women are empowered at a higher level than before, but some inequalities are still. Literature review has shown that it is vital always to adopt proper methodological frameworks and empirical analyses when determining how best to measure empowerment. Using data from Moser (1993), he looked at the interaction between gender and development, focusing on the importance of gender mainstreaming, which entails the integration of gender considerations into different policies and programmes (Moser, 1993). Shields (1995) initially disclosed existing theoretical direction, coped with identifying the very definition of empowerment and accentuated women's perspectives on their empoweredness in their lives (Shields, 1995). Anand and Sen (1995) later improved on the previous measures of gender inequality while Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998) presented the GEM construct and its determination (Pillarisetti & Gillivray, 1998). Changes and forms of criticism of these measures have been made continually. While critiques have been levelled, more significant were the methodological changes initiated by Bardhan and Klasen (1999), who pinpointed both conceptual and empirical difficulties with GDI and GEM that led to changes in how the UNDP calculated these indices.

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Subsequent checkups via Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000) and Dijkstra (2002) offered other indicators, such as the Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE), to rectify these vices (Dijkstra & Hanmer, 2000; Dijkstra, 2002). Malhotra and others critique the measurement and analysis of women's empowerment, which has been evidenced through methodological aspects (Malhotra et al., 2002). For example, in Bangladesh, Barkat (2008) pointed out that while female-headed households are respected in society, women remain confined to mere Clipboard9 and decision-making for and by women is an area that requires awareness building and capacity enhancement (Barkat, 2008). Klasen and Schüler address some of the issues with the GDI, suggesting the use of new gender-related measures, including the provision of two Human Development Indices, one for males and the other for females, and the computation of a gender gap index. As much as India has evolved over the past few decades regarding gender equality, the state of women's empowerment today is quite varied. Chattopadhyay and Duflo also discovered that women's political reservations led to more women's involvement in policy matters (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2001). Some of the women's concerns raised included Women's human rights, barriers to access to basic human rights, and the 'Proxy Women' phenomenon in the Panchayat bodies (Mahanta, 2002; Institute of Social Sciences, 2003). The 2003 Human Development Report for Assam included the issues of inequality between men and women in different domains of life, including poverty, violence against women, and their underrepresentation in politics (Government of Assam, 2003). Various cross-sectional surveys and sex surveys have used gender empowerment measures and have established that women in India continue to be vulnerable to men, and there has not been any improvement as was estimated by Kishor & Gupta (2004). In details, while endorsing the practice of maternal empowerment concerning child nutrition and immunization, Parashar (2004) affirmed that empowerment was associated with change across various dimensions. Another aspect of the economic dimension that has been urged to promote social beneficence over the years comprises corruption and violence. Education, political activity and legal capacity are potent drivers towards empowering women (Desai & Thakkar, 2007). Narayan (2007) offered a self-assessment ladder of power and right to empower, as a type of measure – ladder (Narayan, 2007). Figueras (2008) established the continuation of Table 1 4, the effect of women in politics, exploring not only the impact of their representation on public goods and policy but also the gender and social status of politicians (Figueras, 2008). Further, Shariff (2009) suggested that women's empowerment should be conceived of in terms of a Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) which included six components and was built by accessing credible survey and government data (Shariff, 2009). Mishra and Nayak (2010) noted the significance of education where human development was concerned, especially for women in catapulting workforce productivity, carrying out democratic responsibilities, and acquisition of skills (Mishra & Nayak, 2010). As the current study reveals that, despite the exhaustive literature on women's Empowerment in India, there is a gap to conduct a new empirical analysis covering different aspects of females' emancipation in this country including decision-making power inside households, economic self-sufficiency, mobility, political activity, attitude towards patriarchal model of gender relationships, access to media, education, and the level of female violence. This study intends to serve this useful purpose by assessing the current situation of women's empowerment in India relying on various sources of information.

Methodology

This review aims to evaluate major critical papers on women's rights and provide summaries of empirical works on the subject with particular reference to women in India. The methodology comprises the following steps: The methodology comprises the following steps:

Literature Search and Selection: A thorough literature analysis was done with an emphasis on academic databases, journals, books, and reports to capture papers with themes of women empowerment. This choice was made based on the goal of the review as the concerning study aimed at identifying methodological aspects, empirical findings, and measures and tools of empowerment.

Categorization of Studies: Based on the type of studies that could be achieved separately based on the identified literature, the papers were classified into two broad categories, namely, International and Indian. This categorization made the review easier since there was a clear separation between global and country-specific data.

Data Extraction and Synthesis: Specific findings on authors, year of publication, participants, and regions of focus were selectively extracted from each of the studies conducted. Thresholding all the collected data helped compile a vast overview of the current state of Women Empowerment, the methods applied, and the instruments used for assessment.

Critical Evaluation: To provide a fair and objective evaluation of the work of two studies and the identification of further research opportunities, the following assessment was conducted by the researcher on the foundation of two methodologically sound significant studies in the subject: It also assisted in determining which facets require more studies and gave information about the efficacy of various forms of empowerment.

Presentation of Results: The results of this tangible review were presented in the form of a narrative of the findings that pertain from global literature and the Indian context. Governmental and non-governmental publications with truly pioneering renditions and rich approaches in women's empire were underlined to emphasize its crucial contributions and methods.

Thus, by employing this methodology, the review is intended to review the literature in search of significant contributions and gaps in the context of women's empowerment. The review includes studies that constitute the

theoretical and methodological development of empowerment, women's challenges, and the effectiveness of the distinct improvement initiatives. This approach leads to understanding the status of women's empowerment at the present stage on the global scale and in India, using data from various sources.

Analysing Relevant Literature on the Women's Empowerment

Empowering women is one of the most discussed and researched topics in current literature, with studies and research both at a global level and in the Indian context. This review summarizes findings from essential studies and discusses their methodological issues, empirical contributions, and advancements in measurement models of women's empowerment.

Global Studies

Closely related to the postmodernist approach is the classical work of Moser (1993) on gender and development, in which the author discusses gender policy and practice concerns. These papers provide the necessary background on how gender impacts development and can thus be used as a reference when comparing different papers. Similarly, Shields describes theoretical and practical approaches to the study of empowerment (1995). Empowerment is conceptualized with an emphasis on women's experiences and the meaning of empowerment in their lives. In essence, it is from such unique aspects that this study underpins the intricacy of emancipatory endeavours when revealed from the perceptions of women. Anand and Sen (1995), and Pillariseti and Gillivray (1998) argue on establishing measures for gender equity and the GDI and GEM. There are several problems in these indices, as discussed by Bardhan and Klasen (1999), and some modifications to the indices are recommended, which have been taken up by the UNDP. Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000) and Dijkstra (2002) moreover turned the logical critique and expanded it by providing new methods like the Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE). Some of the studies by Lim (2010) and Malhotra et al. (2002) have highlighted methodological issues in the measurement and analysis of women's empowerment, which has added to the debate on improving the index of women's empowerment. Klasen (2006) and Schüller (2006) have then followed up, with Klasen proposing improvements in the measure of GDI and GEM and Beteta proposing another measure, which Beteta has called the Gender Empowerment Enabling Environment (GEEE) to cover non-economic indices of decision making. Building on this contrast, Barkat's (2008) contextual study of women empowerment in Bangladesh reveals the actual gap between the Bangladesh society that pays much respect to women in their capacity as mothers and women's real empowerment accomplished in major decision-making standards. Klasen and Schüller (2009) build on previous arguments by introducing new measures of both genders, namely, the GGI and the male and female HDIs.

Indian Studies

On political reservations for women in India, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) assess the effect of reserved positions for women, identifying that female incumbents provide more representation to women in policy-making processes. Access to fundamental human rights, a unique study on proxies in panchayat bodies, the role of women in Indian politics, and Mahanta's 2002 study are other areas. As Kishor and Gupta pointed out in 2004, women in India continue to be constrained in their power compared to men, and there has been no improvement over time. A study by Parashar (2004) documents how maternal empowerment affects child nutrition and immunization, and for this to be effective, it should happen in many folds. Sridevi (2005) and Blumberg (2005) note the impact of economic emancipation besides enhancing economic worth and the generally desirable social values such as decreased corrupt practices and violence. Concerning violence against women, Shaw Karat (2005) and Panda and Agarwal (2005) enclose different aspects of violence against women, while Vashistha et al. (2005) explore the property status aspect in marital violence. Desai and Thakkar (2007) have resorted to political participation, legal rights, and education as paths to empowering women. Thus, Narayan (2007) introduces the Self-Assessment Ladder of Power and Rights, reflecting a proper tool for empowerment. Figueras (2008) has investigated the relationship between women's political representation and public offering and policy in India in this area, and the results affirmed that the gender and social standing of the politicians do it. Mohd suggests it. Azizuddin Khan Shariff in his work entitled Indian State Rankings: A Human Development Snapshot, 2009 Shariff (2009) A certain measure towards gender empowerment in India based on six indexes are developed the Gender Empowerment Index: Mishra and Nayak (2010) posit that education as the most potent factor in human resource development; education as a form of literacy; and educational capability as a form of skills, development and productivity; for women in particular (Table 1).

Table 1 Findings from the Review

Author	Year	Findings	Region
Kabeer	1999	The theoretical underpinning of empowerment is the ability to make first-order decisions that result in desired outcomes, incorporating three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements.	Global
Various Authors	2020	Vocational training has a beneficial impact on income and women's economic empowerment. International tourism promotes women's empowerment, while gender disparity in health, education, access to finance, and economic growth hinders it.	Asia

Author	Year	Findings	Region
Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender	2002	Comprehensive framework for measuring women's empowerment, focusing on individual and collective agency.	South Asia
Duflo	2012	Discusses the interplay between women's empowerment and economic development, suggesting that empowering women improves economic outcomes.	Global
Cornwall & Rivas	2015	Examines the concept of empowerment in development discourse, highlighting the importance of context-specific interventions.	Sub-Saharan Africa
Hameed et al.	2014	Investigate microfinance's impact on women's empowerment in rural areas, showing positive social and economic status effects.	Pakistan
Samman & Santos	2009	Introduces a multidimensional poverty index that includes women's empowerment indicators.	Latin America
Moser	1993	Examined the interrelationship between gender and development, gender policy formulation, and gender planning and practices.	Global
Shields	1995	Provided an exploratory framework for understanding and developing the concept of empowerment from both theoretical and practical perspectives.	Global
Anand & Sen	1995	Developed a measure of gender inequality.	Global
Bardhan & Klasen	1999	Critically examined GDI and GEM, suggesting modifications to these gender-related indicators of the UNDP.	Global
Chattopadhyay & Duflo	2001	Studied the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions in India, finding increased participation if the village leader was a woman.	India
Kishor & Gupta	2004	Revealed that women in India were disempowered relative to men and noted little change in their empowerment over time.	India
Parashar	2004	Linked mother's empowerment in India to child nutrition and immunization, suggesting simultaneous empowerment across different dimensions for holistic benefits.	India
Figueras	2008	Studied the effect of female political representation in India on public goods, policy, and expenditure, noting that politician's gender and social position matter.	India
Shariff	2009	Proposed a specific measure for gender empowerment in India, considering six dimensions and constructing a Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) for Indian states.	India
Mishra & Nayak	2010	Emphasized the central role of education in human development, highlighting its importance for increasing productivity and participation in civic activities.	India

Summary of review

Consistent with this perspective, the current literature review presents several works with diverse methodologies and discoveries related to women's emancipation. Some critical themes for the implementation are: Issues on the building and evaluating measurement indices, economic and political participation, and education. The studies call for more attention to the fact that although the scientific front has already come a long way in attempting to define and quantify women's empowerment, constant improvements are required for the methodologies and the indices used in those domains. Although these theoretical frameworks provide a basis for understanding the general concept of women empowerment, the Indian condition requires certain unique cultural and socio-economic factors to be strategized. Sorting these considerations out is the goal of the present study, which takes stock of women's empowerment in India by considering different dimensions of the phenomenon based on data from multiple sources.

Discussion

Concerning the literature review on women's empowerment, it is noteworthy to pinpoint several general messages and notes of similarity between the global and the Indian scenarios. At the global level, even though more extensive efforts have been made to raise and elaborate such efforts as the Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure, have been developed and criticized. These measures have helped bring into view issues of gender differences, although the approaches have received considerable scrutiny about conceptual and measurement validity. Some studies have pointed out the need for more refinement and the creation of other integrated indices that would reflect all the aspects of women's gender equality and empowerment. Moser (1993) similarly outlined the policy implications of this interdependence of gender and development to support gender-sensitive policy making and policy implementation. As suggested by Shields (1995), the analysis for gender empowerment should, therefore, focus on women's frames since the empowerment process is constantly in the construction process. Anand and Sen (1995),

Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998)'s work, Bardhan and Klasen (1999) and Dijkstra (2002) show that they are continuously working on refining the measures of gender Inequality. Altogether, these studies assert the need and value of better instruments that account for women's and gender's empowerments. Different attitudes towards women are also seen in Bangladesh where Disem Barkat (2008) noted that although women are valued in their prescribed domesticity, they lack the ability to make choices for themselves. This emphasizes the importance of a better concept of women's empowerment that is not only in line with having formal roles and responsibilities but also having awareness and capacity building.

In India, the picture of women's empowerment is vast, and it is clearly seen that many aspects need to be addressed through the various studies conducted according to the various perspectives. While analyzing one of the most thoroughly studied issues namely, the political reservations for women, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) point out that the proportion of women attending policy-making meetings rises when women lead such policies. This conveys the message that structural modifications also positively influence the attainment of empowering goals. Specific concerns by Mahanta (2002) and the Institute of Social Sciences (2003) include fundamental human rights, the concept of 'Proxy Women' in Panchayat bodies, and thus, the overture towards any meaningful capacity-building interventions. Poverty, high level of violence, and non-involvement in political issues and processes are some of the major problematic areas of women in South Asia with Aid to political participation: critical issues confronting women in Assam that AHDR (2003) points out. This paper cites Kishor and Gupta (2004), who show global gender imbalances with women still marginalized compared to men. In her paper titled "Empowerment of Women and Child Health Outcomes" published in 2004, Lal Parashar addresses this issue of ability, arguing that multiple forms of empowerment should be pursued in parallel to optimize positive effects on child health. Out of these dimensions, economic empowerment stands out as essential, whereas the research by Sridevi (2005) and Blumberg (2005) indicates this dimension is vital to promoting gender equity, besides experiencing numerous social advantages. Considering political participation, legal rights and education as fundamental components of empowerment (Desai & Thakkar, 2007) introduces an empowering ladder of power and rights self-assessment to empower (Narayan, 2007). The descriptive data detailed in the typology of microfinance for female entrepreneurs are underpinned by two measures: the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) for India, as conceptualized by Shariff (2009). This method of viewing empowers offers a more extensive definition of the said strategy in the Indian setting. Mishra and Nayak (2010) point out the pivotal place education occupies in human and human capital development especially for women for productivity, participation in democratic society and skills acquisition.

Conclusion

There is agreement with the empirical and theoretical review of literature on women's empowerment to stress the fact that although the concept of women's empowerment involves a process of enabling women to gain control over their own lives, it is a complex concept that requires multifunctional interventive measures. It should be noted that internationally, there has been a striving to make concepts such as GDI and GEM more effective through carving, although both these measures have been criticized and called upon for refinement. Societal status of women in Bangladesh, while acknowledging the traditional respect for women's domestic roles, they profoundly lack initiative, power, and advocacy. This calls for awareness and more training of the people. The position of women in India is a matter of multi-factorial concern, where political involvement and participation of women are fundamental human rights for women, as well as wives' and mothers' rights in economic empowerment and education. It was assessed that political reservations for women have brought positive outcomes in terms of changes in structure-empowerment. Gender gaps and problems like the incidence of domestic violence or low political outcomes remain critical issues. In the present study, to contribute further to the existing stream of knowledge, an attempt is made to explore the status of women empowerment in India about parameters like decision-making power in households, economic independence, mobility restrictions, political activism, tolerance to stereotyped gender roles, media exposure, educational achievements, and experience of partner-associated violence. By integrating voices from various sources, this paper aims to offer an informed perspective on the reality of women's empowerment in India and, therefore, add to the discourses of gender parity and sustainable development.

Implications

Policy Formulation and Implementation: The review supports the need to ensure gender-sensitive policies and practices within the respective contexts. Therefore, in the context of empowering women, policymakers should consider that empowerment is economic, social, political, and psychological. Policies must reflect the information on how women experience their circumstances and their problems so that empowering goals will encompass all possibilities according to the situation.

Measurement and Evaluation: For this reason, the critique of current measures, like the GDI or GEM, underlines the lack of an appropriate measure that allows for a balanced and realistic appraisal of women's empowerment. Namely, it is vital to create solid indices that account for all the aspects of empowering women and girls since measuring the changes is a process that can reveal more dynamics for improvement. Researchers and organizations must work together further to develop these measures and make the measurements appropriate to the contextual factors and free from methodologic bias.

Economic Empowerment: In this line, economic power is the most significant theme in promoting gender equity worldwide. Efforts that help women acquire more financial resources and job opportunities and engage in economic activities can reduce their decision-making power, improving their quality of life. Vocational education, financial support with access to microcredits, and assistance in women-owned enterprises are critical to creating viable sources of employment.

Education and Skill Development: Knowledge enhancement is recognized as a critical necessity supporting women's emancipation. Youths, particularly females, should be given priority in education and any other intervention that seeks to enhance their literacy levels. Further, training to acquire marketable skills to enable women to improve their chances of employment and increase their efficiency levels in carrying out their economic and civic responsibilities is essential.

Political Participation: Discussions on political reservations for women showed that women's representation in policy-making was positive after these reservations were put in place, such work stresses the importance of structural reforms to see more women in political positions. Promoting women's engagement in politics and other decision-making roles can help reduce marginalization and enhance representational and governance outcomes.

Addressing Violence and Discrimination: The review has preserved and examined the concerns of domestic violence, as well as discriminations based on gender. The governmental and non-governmental acts and measures such as the prevention of violence against women and girls, the ensuring the rights of the victims, and the fighting for gender equality are crucial in ensuring that women enjoy a free and violence-free life.

Directions for Future Study

Longitudinal Studies: The following directions should be addressed in future research: The core issue that should be researched in the future is the dynamic and the long-term trends changes in women's empowered status. It can also help assess the effectiveness of empowering strategies regarding their future outcomes and promote a more comprehensive understanding of the elements that foster positive, progressive change.

Intersectional Analysis: There is thus a scholarly necessity to make gender-sensitive regarding the other social categories like race, class, caste, and ethnic group. Knowing their gender, sexuality, and age empowers WRs, and understanding how any of these factors affect others in the context of women's and girls' empowerment can inform how better interventions can be crafted.

Context-Specific Research: Future researches should investigate how the findings could be applied in various cultural, economic and political environments; moreover, other countries' experiences in empowering women should be compared. Empirical research on the nature of empowerment across certain geographical zones or specific countries may also help identify empowerment's enabling and disabling conditions.

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