

EMPOWERING THE INDIAN NATION THROUGH EMPOWERING THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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ABSTRACT : The nation is not a geographical concept. A piece of land with a certain area can't be called the nation. The nation means the qualitative people in the terms of all. People should be empowered in all manner of economic, social, political, physical, mental and spiritual. The nation survives and strengthens only through strong people. If the people are weak, then the nation ends. To strengthen the nation, both men and women should be empowered without any discrimination. Liberty and equality are the two important pillars of the democracy. It is a harsh reality that there is a lack of equality and gender justice in Indian democracy. The girl child, teenager girl and women have become victims of discrimination, oppression, insecurity and violence in India. It is a matter of sorrow that they have not been empowered even after many years of independence. To empower the Indian nation, it is necessary to strengthen the girls and women in every form. Today's adolescent girl is a woman citizen of tomorrow. The adolescent girls are facing so many problems in the Indian society. The research article discusses the empowerment of adolescent girls, its importance in nation building, obstacles and problems hindering the empowerment. Useful suggestions have also been presented at the end of the discussion.

Keywords: Adolescence, Adolescent girls, Empowerment, Nation building.

Introduction:

Any nation is composed of emotional and qualitative people. If the nation wants to be powerful, its citizens must be strong in all respects. The grassroots democratic values like equality, freedom, brotherhood and justice in the nation should truly be cherished. It is a fact that there is not enough empowerment of poor sections of the society and women in India.

It has been said in the Manusmriti that

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः।

Yatra naryastu pujoyante ramante tatra Devata,
yatraitaastu na pujoyante sarvaastatrafalaah kriyaah

The meaning of the above sloka is where women are worshiped, there the Gods rejoice and where ever women are dishonored, insulted all action becomes ineffective and remains unfruitful. Thus, women should be given honor and equal status in the society. It is necessary to mention here that these matters are limited only to the scripture. The ground reality of society is different. The women have been shown great and honorable in all religious texts of India. But in current times women's position and status is a matter of worry. Social, economic, religious and political factors are responsible for the problem of women empowerment.

What is empowerment?

Oxford Dictionary observes¹:

Empowerment: "Authority or power given to someone to do something."

According to World Bank Report²,

“The term empowerment has different meanings in different sociocultural and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always leads to lively discussion. These terms include self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one’s values, capable of fighting for one’s rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability—to mention only a few. These definitions are embedded in local value and belief systems.”

Major obstacles against adolescent girls' empowerment:

There is some obstacle in the direction of empowering the girls in India. Indian society is traditional and inert. The social structure is based on caste system. In some communities, conservative customs are prevailing. Such castes tend to discriminate towards girls. Girls do not have enough freedom for their development. Girls are not given the right to choose in any respect. Girls can't be educated because of social restrictions. Education is a medium of empowerment. In India the proportion of women's illiteracy is high. Census of India 2011 report³ states that “Now, if we consider female literacy rate in India, then it is lower than the male literacy rate as many parents do not allow their female children to go to schools. They get married off at a young age instead. Though child marriage has been lowered to very low levels, it still happens. Many families, especially in rural areas believe that having a male child is better than having a baby girl. So the male child gets all the benefits. Today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. The literacy rate in India has always been a matter of concern but many NGO initiatives and government ads, campaigns and programs are being held to spread awareness amongst people about the importance of literacy. Also the government has made strict rules for female equality rights. India literacy rate has shown significant rise in the past 10 years.”

Child marriages are prevalent in India due to religious beliefs and social customs. Parents decide when to marry and with whom to marry so far as marriage of the girls are concerned. According to religious beliefs in India, girls should be married when they enter puberty. Girls do not get enough education due to child marriage. Due to inadequate education, girls can't be empowered. Not only that, but due to child marriage, girls suffer from many social, economic, physical, psychological problems.

India's family system and parenting are also responsible for some extent. During puberty, girls are suffering from many problems. Girls do not present their problems in the family due to social system and strict parental nature. Thus, such girls become victims of psychological diseases. In Indian society, malnutrition is high in girls. The effect of physical weakness is on the mental health of the girls.

There is a lack of appropriate government policies regarding empowerment of the adolescent girls. The government has made some programs to empower girls but they are not implemented properly. However, it is a good thing that the government is doing good positive efforts right now for girls' education. Anil Kumar Jha writes⁴ that “The overall large number of adolescent population in India and the vulnerability of adolescent girls and their specific needs points towards an urgent need of spreading awareness, enhancing school enrolment, raising the age at marriage and first birth, meeting nutritional needs and empowering and capacity building of adolescent girls so that they can deal with the challenges of life in more effective way. This requires combined efforts of different sections of society and all the stakeholders working for the empowerment of adolescent girls. Government in coordination with NGO can address the needs of adolescent girls by working for their protection from harmful traditional practices including early marriage leading to teenage pregnancy and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, lack of education, sexual exploitation and abuse and for the development of life skills and self-esteem.”

Conclusion:

At the end of the discussion, it can be said that the nation is not a geographical but emotional concept. Nation is qualitative people. All the people of the nation should be raised without any discrimination. All the people and the classes should get equal opportunities for development. There is no expected development of women in India. Girls and women have not been empowered in the true sense. Adolescent girls should be empowered in all matters immediately in India. The government and society must overcome the barriers to the empowerment of the adolescent girls.

Suggestions:

- (1) To empower the nation, all the people should be empowered without any discrimination. The strength of the nation lies on its qualitative people.

- (2) The society should adopt modern values by abandoning traditional values. People should not follow the conservative customs of the society.
- (3) Teenage girls should be empowered in all manner of economic, social, physical and psychological. Especially Teenage girls must overcome malnutrition problems.
- (4) Child marriage must be prevented from the society. Provide adequate opportunities for education and employment to girls.
- (5) Government, non government organizations and society should take efforts in the direction of empowerment seriously. It is a collective responsibility of all.

References:

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