

ICT: AN EMERGING TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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The first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, once said, “To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, and the nation moves.” In developing countries, women are abused or misused in various sectors. Submissiveness or compliance and servility are in their nature because of the inequality they are facing. Despite the great growth of education in many countries, women are still not considered as equal gender everywhere. The status of women is considered to be minor or inferior even after their great contribution to society. It is the right time for women to stand up for her.

Women's empowerment is a burning issue. Various NGOs are working for the betterment of women and giving them training for self-independence. Goal 5 of sustainable development goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Anonymous (2020).

The government is also taking this issue seriously and has announced various policies in favour of women. In this scenario, information and communication technology also play an important role. Through ICT, women are getting security, awareness, knowledge, employment, confidence, popularity etc. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Women's Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of women to ensure equal rights to women. Women empowerment helps women to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. When women get empowered, the whole family gets benefits. Vivek (2021).

There has been progress over the last decades: More girls are going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women are serving in parliament, and positions of leadership, and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality. Still, many women in India and different parts of the world are missing opportunities in various employment sectors, and many segregate them because they are women. Mansi N *et al* (2021).

Empower is a multidimensional word that includes social, physical, spiritual, mental, political, and psychological dimensions. Empowerment means personal growth in decision-making, analyzing critical situations, coping with all circumstances, and facing challenges, which will help improve the health and wealth of the nation. With respect to the impact of the pandemic on education, an estimated 27 crore children in India have been affected as a result of school closure. This is worrisome since, in addition to learning, government schools provide mid-day meals to children, which is an essential factor for vulnerable children and girls to attend school. Likewise, with the shift in classes to the digital

mode, it will be particularly difficult for girls to access education, mainly because of increased expectations to contribute to household chores. Budget (2021) Access to education is also impacted because of poor access to technology, wherein only an estimated 28% of women have access in rural India, while in the urban areas, access is estimated to be 33%. Out of the total allocation towards education in 2020-'21, a mere 0.4% was allocated to women as per the Gender Budget Statement, which is less than sufficient to meet the growing challenges of access to education in light of the pandemic. Sinha B (2019).

DIMENSIONS AND PARAMETERS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

- i. The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;
- ii. The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;
- iii. The economic component requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However, she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;
- iv. The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change; and
- v. There is a physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process

There are basically five dimensions of women empowerment namely cognitive dimension, psychological, economic, political and physical. Sinha and Shayay (2022).

ICTs are also used to refer to the convergence of media technology such as audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks, by means of a unified system of cabling (including signal distribution and management) or link system. However, there is no universally accepted definition of ICTs considering that the concepts, methods and tools involved in ICTs are steadily evolving on an almost daily basis. ICT is playing an important role in changing the attitude and perspective of society towards women. It is creating a psychological comfort level of women at their work place by providing them additional knowledge and skills.

Role of ICT in Women Empowerment:

Hussain (2018) revealed that there was positive relationship between use of mobile and internet with women's empowerment. As use of mobile and internet increase the women's empowerment also increase so the Government should increase the availability of mobile network and internet facilities to enhance the women's empowerment.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is a broader term for Information Technology (IT), which refers to all communication technologies, including the internet, wireless

networks, cell phones, computers, software, middleware, videoconferencing, social networking, and other media applications and services enabling users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate information in a digital form.

Following are some aspects of life which have a direct influence of ICT especially on women:

(i) Women's increased access to job Market and improve entrepreneurship using ICT

- In most countries, women comprise a significant percentage of the labourforce and, in some, account for more than the world average of 51 %.

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has found that the use of information and communications technology (ICT) has led not only to better business performance for women but also better living conditions. It can also be particularly effective in loosening constraints on women entrepreneurs.

(ii) Increase of average household income in villages Rural women's access to paid work is crucial to achieving self-reliance and the wellbeing of dependent family members using ICT

(iii) Women empowerment

(a) Personal empowerment

Obtaining the knowledge and information they wanted.

- Feeling comfortable participating in certain group activities or able to talk about certain social or personal topics.

(b) Educational empowerment: ICT deliver information about whole world in a language they understand and a medium that they would be comfortable with.

- Wide knowledge of each area, understanding of new concepts

- ICT help in non-formal and adult women education.

(c) Economic empowerment • ICT helps them to increase their monthly income.

- ICT provide jobs and opportunities to merge with large industries.

- ICT education makes women economically sound that is source of other all types of women empowerments.

(d) Social empowerment • Gaining access to new and useful knowledge, information and awareness about a range of issues, topics and activities of interest to women. This new information and knowledge often provided mental stimulation and broadened participants' thinking.

- Participating in various activities with other women and people in positions of influence where you can openly discuss issues, share concerns and experiences, and reflect on issues affecting you

(e) Psychological empowerment : An increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.

- Feeling more valued, respected.

- Greater motivation, inspiration, enthusiasm and interest to develop new skills and knowledge.

- Feeling much less isolated from others (particularly other supportive women) and, as a result, experiencing greater wellbeing, happiness and enjoyment of life. Rathi S (2015). It can be at the

organizational, personal, or social levels. Through the Internet, television, radio and mobile phones, women are getting information about all the real incidents happening in the world and learning skills to tackle situations; it is helping to bring leadership qualities to them. ICT has provided a new term, e-governance, and all developing countries are working on this. It can get greater access to services, greater accountability, transparency and citizen empowerment, strategic rewards such as improved decision-making through information, improved knowledge sharing and organizational learning, improved interactions with citizens, other government organizations and businesses and industry, improved market relationships between government and private sectors and greater ability for organizational change management.

(f) Technological empowerment • New knowledge, awareness and understanding about new ICTs and their potential benefits and impacts. The development of new skills, experience and greater confidence and competence in using new communication technologies.

- Advice and support in using email and the Internet, provided in ways that often met the participants' needs very well.

(g) Political empowerment • Having a voice for their rights.

- Feel decision-making capacity.

- Networking or meeting with people in government and industry and other women to discuss issues affecting (iv) Shrinking Information Asymmetry through ICT.

- Information asymmetry is a problem that prevents communication processes from being effective in the digital economy

- Information and communication technology (ICT) has been recently documented to increase information sharing between market participants in various sectors of developing countries. Avram and Priescu I (2015).

[8] Improved Governance • The essence of e-government is to link government activities with the advanced technology that the world is having today. This technology has already done a remarkable job in bringing efficiency to the private sector through e-business, e-banking, e-procurement, etc. E-government is engaged not only in providing citizen services but also in improving public sector efficiency, transparency, and accountability in government functions, as well as decreasing the costs of public administration. Kajtazi (2016).

(vi) Indigenous Knowledge • Indigenous knowledge is the basis for many remote, rural, and marginalized communities in society and, as such, is an important component in the educational development of members within these communities.

- In parallel with the increasing recognition of the value and relevance of Indigenous knowledge to today's world and the need to preserve it is recognition of the role that information technologies (IT) can play in its capture, management and dissemination. (Hunter 2014).

(vii) Easy-Family Communication (There is no doubt about it) the way we communicate with our family members today has changed dramatically in recent years. Just a decade ago, text messaging, blogging, and emails were not methods of family communication. Today, they are widely

used by families around the world. For example, parents use text messages to remind children of their curfews.

- Children send emails to their parents to give them their Christmas lists. College students use Web cameras to say good night to their family members who live hundreds of miles away. These are just a few of the many ways in which technology has changed the way families communicate with one another in today's modern world. (Anonymous 2015).

(viii) Increase Social awareness • In this digital era, social networking has already become a social norm for many of the new generations of teenagers. Updating Facebook status, tweeting and posting photographs on Instagram have become everyday activities. Their life is reflected in social networking, where there are a lot of memories by posting images of their happy moments and recording some other emotionally important happenings and events (Aziz 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

In the recent years, through the implementation of various ICT related projects, the Women Empowerment is been improved. There are also many projects for the greater involvement of women. The main object is to make the women both economically and socially strong. The study clearly found that the women were immensely benefited from the use of ICT. ICT has made a tremendous impact in imparting knowledge on modern technology and its uses. This study concluded that the ICT (information and communication technology) empower a woman in various areas like social, educational, psychological, political, technological and economical and well as few degrees of disempowerment due to some internal and external reasons. The majority of women in the developing world do not have access to ICTs due to variety of barriers as such the infrastructural, social, cultural and linguistic. Still, majority of women in the developing world do not have access to ICTs due to variety of barriers as such the poverty, computer literacy, infrastructural, social, cultural and linguistic etc. So, we should focus on how to cross such barriers which help women empowerment better.

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