

MAINSTREAMING WOMEN AND ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Gender bias had been an old phenomena throughout the world. Women have always taken a back seat in economic, political and social structure in any society across the globe and this all because of the socialization and the patriarchal society. Though half of the population of the world constitutes of women and girls but their contribution in most of the areas are not significant. The biggest challenge for any government is the empowerment of women to bring them and contribute in the mainstream activities. Today in 21st century there is no doubt that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) helps every one in every possible field. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become a significant and integral part of our life. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be defined as a diverse set of electronic technologies and technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, store, disseminate and manage information. Information and Communication Technology such as videos, televisions, multimedia and computer software which combines text, sound, and colorful moving images can be used to provide challenging and authentic content that will engage the learning process. Women play an important role in various sectors such as economic, political, social, sports, educational, enterprising etc. The objective of the present paper is to examine the relationship between the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) and women empowerment and discusses the main challenges and impediments faced by women, recommends strategies to address those challenges and ways to cultivate the conditions leading to women's empowerment. This conceptual paper is based on secondary information collected from different sources such as books, journal articles, newspapers, reports of various government organization, non-governmental organizations and so on.

Keywords: WOMEN, ICT, EMPOWERMENT, INDIA

GENDER AS A CHALLENGES

Gender is a social construct which plays a significant role in division of labor and it is strongly seen by the fact that men usually assigned the role of the bread earners and females as the care takers for family and children. India is a country with complex cultural, religious, and lingual diversity than any other country in the world. The issues and evils in societies is not new and have long history. Historically, men subjugated the women in all the possible fields. The process of gendering (Gender Socialization), in which people are produced or thought to behave as men and women, is done through different forms of rules and regulations which is totally based on socially constructed ideas – some of which are adopted and some which have to be viciously enforced. Women are always treated as weak and subordinate to men where men have the privilege and dominance over women. The root of the gender inequality in the Indian society lies in the patriarchal society. **According to Menon (2012).** The division of the labor is in the way that women are responsible for the housework and reproduction. She further argued that even the surname of the women is not her. Such is the irony of patriarchy that women need to attach the surname either of her father or husband. At present, millions of women are engaged in the diverse employment sectors like agriculture, industries and services. Women work in both organized and

unorganized sectors of Indian economy. The study of **Rowlands (1995)** stated that empowerment is more than simply to the access to decision making, it also includes the processes in which the individuals perceive themselves as decision makers. **Kishore (1997)** observed that empowerment is self-confidence and being able to take decision and act according to one's own interest. **Bukhari and Sharma (2014)** stated in their study that to challenge the inequality between the genders, developmental organizations play a vital or important role. They also gave the reference of the report by world bank entitled, "Attacking Poverty" which revealed that "we have tried lot to accomplished by now on the name of gender equality but it is also true that there is no region of the world where both women and men are equal in legal, social and economic rights". **Rao and Kelleher (2003)** in their research study mention that girls are treated as the burden or a liability to the family because of the evil of dowry system in our country. Even we have the proper legislation against such evil system where it is clearly mentioned that giving and taking of dowry in any form is restricted but it is still prevalent in the society. Women are facing the extreme level of domestic violence because of this only. It is an irony that in many cases girls get killed or aborted in the womb. Because of the notion that women are the burden. Abortion has become a doubtful but brutal agent of a patriarchy that subjugated women. Haryana and Punjab today epitomize the mounting phenomenon of feticide, or sex-selective abortion of girls. Such abortions have resulted in more and more bent sex ratio and the sex ratio in Punjab has now fallen below 880 girls to 1000 boys (with some districts as low as 754 girls to 1000 boys (Census, 2011). **Lillykutty (2003)** has observed the relation between education and empowerment of women with the quality of life. She states that empowerment of women is when she is politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make decisions in matters that affect her. When one has command over wealth, education, social status, skill etc. and has access to formal financial services then can be an example of true empowerment.

ICT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are one of the best ways to include the women in the process of empowerment. It involves and integrates them in economic, political, technological and social environment of the world. ICT has now become the integral part of our life. **Jones (2010)** stated that technology travels with people. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be defined as a diverse set of electronic technologies and technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, store, disseminate and manage information. **Akude & Ajuzie, (2011)** in their study mention that "Information Communication Technology like videos, televisions, multimedia and computer software which combines text, sound, and colorful moving images can be used to provide challenging and authentic content that will engage the people in learning process". Information and communication dissemination is done very easily through various technologies like radio, T.V, Mobile etc. Hence we can say that information and communication technologies have impacted the life of the people to the greater extent. **Mastoor and Zorkarkar** observed in their paper that ICT has hasten the process of women empowerment by providing the women with better education, information, and knowledge, training, occupational opportunities, market information, financial services, information about the government programs. **Hossieni and Manjunath (2016)** stated that the relationship between technology and masculinity is so deep-rooted that women are mostly excluded from technical education and also from technical jobs. Therefore there is need to involve parents and aware them about the effect of gender bias within the family, society and nation as a whole. **P.K Mohan (2014)** in his study observed that ICT based Enterprises lead to positive empowerment of women as shown in figure below:-

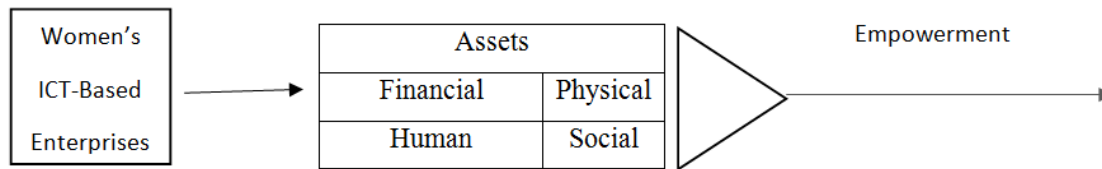


Figure 1. Source: - P.K Mohan 2015

There are many projects/ schemes and programs in India to involve the Women in ICT such as.

- **Vidya Vahini** program was initiated by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2003 under the school computerization program and the main objective was to connect 60,000 government and its aided schools through Internet and Intranet.
- **Ujjas Innovation** which is a project by Indian foundation of Development where they bring out their newsletter which is broadcasted on All India Radio Bhuj station of Gujarat. This is one of the successful program amongst the women to help fight social exploitation and various other issues as dowry, female infanticide, drunkenness amongst the men folk and also enables the women to take part in trade and do business amongst themselves.
- **The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana** also known as Skill India, launched by the Government in 2015. The main aim is to train over 40 crore Indians in different industry-related jobs.
- **The Dhan Foundation and Swayam Krish Sangam**- the both organization were giving ICT based training to poor girls and women so that they have better access towards the resources and makes them self-sufficient.
- **Kudumbashree** is the One of the most successful poverty eradication and women empowerment programme. It is implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala.
- **Datamation Foundation Skill Development** program aims to provide Vocational Training to empower the women and man belonging to most marginalized and weaker sections of the community.

Doncombe , Heeks et. al (2005) in their study stated some of the major benefits of ICT Based Enterprises (IBEs) which are given here under.

- Improvement for financial assets (healthcare, education etc.)
- Improved human assets (manage activities, decision making etc.)
- Improved physical assets (purchase of land, gold, house, physical goods etc.)
- Improves social assets (networking, social relation, dynamics, social and community linkage etc.)
- Empowerment (gaining confidence, self-sufficiency, recognition, acceptance, respect, autonomy, and soon).

Malhotra , Schuler and Boender (2005) stated that empowerment is a multidimensional and dynamic process and can be separated into many components and perspective as resources, agency, and outcome and so on

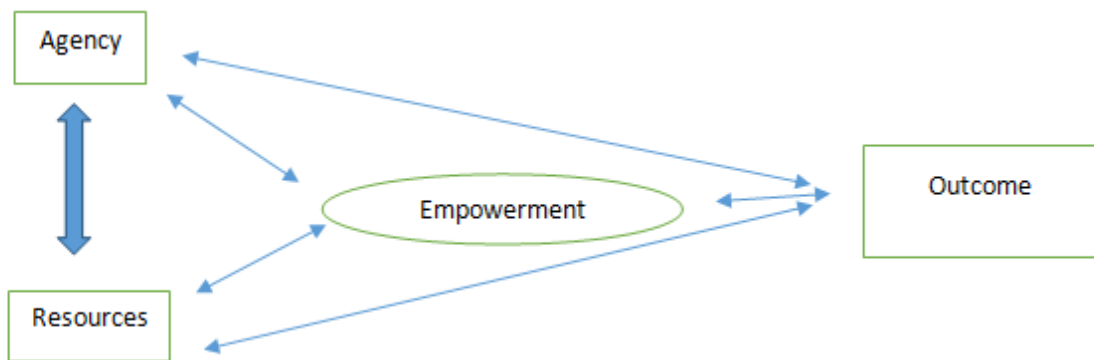


Figure 2. Source Malhotra et, al (relationship between resource, agency and outcome correlating to empowerment)

CHALLENGES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ICT

Hossini and Manjunath (2016) stated various factors that affect and create obstacles in the empowerment of the women through ICT as discussed under:-

Poverty: poverty is considered to be the biggest threat to the peace in the world. Most of the people live in rural area of the India where they do not have access to ICT and many cannot even afford it.

Illiteracy among the women: - There is no doubt that women are defeating and challenging men in all the spheres but we cannot ignore the ground reality. The literacy rate of India as per Census 2011 is 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. Illiteracy leads to unawareness of rights and lack of self-confidence. This difference in education attainment among the women makes them economically, socially, politically disadvantaged and makes them marginalized. Although we have different schemes for the girls like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and government also promoting free and compulsory education under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education Act 2009.

Social Evils: The various social evils like domestic violence, dowry, and early marriage harden the life of the women as **Rao and Kelleher (2003)** in their research study mention that girls are treated as the burden to the family because of the evil of dowry system in our country. “The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) revealed total of 244,270 incidents of crimes against women were reported in the country in 2012, compared with 228,650 in 2011, an increase of 6.4%”. As women are already a burden to their families, introducing them to ICT field means family has to bear the extra burden which families are not ready as she is just a liability and going to someone else’s home after marriage.

Language Barrier: - This is one of the hurdle that most of the content which is available in the internet is in English or may be in Hindi. There is lack of material available in the internet in regional language which creates the challenge among the women to access the information.

Ownership: - as mentioned by **(Menon, 2012)**, that even the surname of the women is not her. Such is the irony of patriarchy that women also need to attach the surname either of her father or husband. The most of the ownership related to the land assets and other things is only occupied by the men. The other things like phone or radio is out of the hands of women. According to the fourth National Family Health Survey (NFHS) dated 2015-16 revealed that less than 46% of women own and use a mobile phone. This huge gap between the ownership and access to the things lead the underprivileged and subservient when it comes to

Information & Communication. Ownership is far thing, even the decision for women whether to keep a phone or not is decided by male counterpart.

If we conclude that after the independence India went through the major legal reforms, now we have sufficient laws and policies to prevent any issue to anyone. But this all still cannot fill the major gap which exists in the society in one way as it is still considered culturally and socially acceptable that men has the ultimate right over all the resources. Having the rights over information and technology by women might take some decades.

NEED OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ICT

The World Bank developed two strategies in 2001 to eradicate poverty in the underdeveloped and developing countries

- Investment in underdeveloped & developing countries
- Empowerment of underprivileged people.

By empowering the people who are underprivileged makes the positive development in the country. In simple words if we encourage empowerment among the underprivileged people we directly or indirectly encourage development of the country as a whole. **Laizu, Armarego and Sudweeks (2010)** in their study mention that women constitute half of the population in the world but due to the extreme discrimination and the subjugation they remain underprivileged as the result there is lack of participation of the women in all the fields i.e. political, economic, decision making, ownership etc. International trade center in their **Gender mainstreaming policy 2010** stated that Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men. It also states that there would be the possible integrated policies and programs in the gendered perspective. To achieve the fifth sustainable goal it is necessary to empower the all women and give them practical support in all the major fields. United Nation Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) also stress upon the ICT as the tool for the upliftment of the women,

Beena and Mathur (2012) came out with some aspects of women life which are influenced by the ICT are given as under:

- Increase in income
- Increase in access in job and entrepreneurship
- Knowledge and information
- Indigenous knowledge
- Increase social awareness
- Increase in using digital services

CONCLUSION

The objective of the present paper was to examine the relationship between the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) and women empowerment. Although women empowerment is a complex and multidimensional concept but somewhere it can be achieved through the proper use of ICT. Women requires such environment where they have full freedom to take decision for themselves, their family and the society. In order to achieve the development in the country we need to empower each and every person in the society. ICT is a revolutionary step to achieve the women empowerment. The effective use of ICT enhances the level of knowledge among the women. Online trainings, e-commerce, e-classes, online trading, online banking is

possible though the use of ICT. ICT on other hand is also creating online based feasible jobs, to achieve the goal of women participation in all the possible service sector. There is a need of adequate research on the role of ICT on women empowerment mostly in developing and underdeveloped countries.

Suggestions and Recommendations:-

The findings of the study demonstrate a strong requirement for the use of ICT. The few recommendations are as under:

- ICT awareness program for women should be organized on regular basis in local language.
- Internet facility should be available for women in every part and it should be available in cheap prices.
- Free computer training center were open for women.
- Digital library, on line training, e-learning would be encourage to women.
- Providing enough safety and support to use the ICT and work.
- The government and NGO need to collaborate to give proper training related to internet banking, e learning, Ecommerce, Mobile use etc. to women.

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