

# **CHAPTER 9**

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Present study intends to analyse whether the policies for enhancing the levels of women empowerment as well as the economic reforms formulated and adopted in India during last few decades, could change the long existing patriarchal norms and rules in Indian society, particularly its attitude towards women in the society. In this context, the study (i) estimates the level of empowerment achieved by Indian women, (ii) identifies the factors responsible for achieving a particular level of empowerment and (iii) tracks the variation of level of empowerment across regions and states with its causes.

This empirical study is based on the unit level data extracted from Third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-06. This is the only data source, which provides information on various socio economic factors, at individual level and at household level for all the Indian states. The respondents included in the study are selected women, who are usual residents of the sample household or visitors who stayed in the sample household the night before the survey.

The study uses limited number of attributes only available from NFHS-3 report. This is the only shortcoming of the study. However, the variables obtained from this source are the outcome of various policies undertaken time to time by Government of India to enhance the empowerment level of women. In this context, these selected variables may

be more appropriate to trail the policy impact on enhancement of empowerment level, which may help to modify the future course of action by the Government of India to meet the target of empowering all women in India.

Being a latent variable an empowerment index (EI) has been constructed by using information on 14 observable variables related to the decision-making power of women. All these variables are classified into four broad decision making groups namely *access to money* (AMI), *spending money decisions* (SPI), *routine household decisions* (RHDI) and *mobility of freedom* (MI). Initially an index is calculated separately for each of these categories and finally all these four categories are summed up to get the total value of the composite index separately for each respondent, which is defined as Empowerment Index (EI). It is found that average value of Empowerment Index (EI) is 7.42 for Indian women and it varies across states. Most of the states could secure medium level of EI followed by the states acquiring lowest value of EI and very few states have higher value of EI.

While studying the impact of components of EI on it, SPI, RHDI and MI have significant impact on EI as should be. Women get more freedom to take decision on routine household works and movement for smooth functioning of daily family activities. On the other hand, women who can take and have the power of making financial decisions seemingly enjoy high level of empowerment in the family.

However, the rank of the states by EI and its components vary. Highly significant rank correlation coefficients between EI and each of RDHI and MI

as well as higher value of average contribution of these to EI indicate that these two are the major contributing components in enhancing empowerment of Indian women as expected. The states below or above all India level exhibit similar trend with respect to RHDI, MI as well as EI. Except a few, rank of the states according to AMI follows the pattern same as that for EI. On the other hand, a contradiction is observed with respect to SPI. Being the most important impacting factor of EI, level of achievement of empowerment with respect to SPI differs from that with respect to AMI, RHDI and MI. This indicates that high value of EI in any state does not mean every time the high level of achievement in true sense.

Based on the results obtained from estimation of regression model fitted to the data for India as a whole it is found that *self confidence* and *awareness generating* factors are mainly responsible for determining the level of women empowerment. Some of these confidence-generating factors are women's education, exposure to media, job, earning in cash, higher income than their husband, and their stay in nuclear family instead of joint families, their economic condition and husband's job status.

All these factors have not been found to be significant in explaining the changes in empowerment level while estimating the model to the data at the zonal levels. Respondent's education level, exposure to media, participation in economic activities with remuneration has been obtained as significant explaining factors at Zonal and state level.

Besides, family structure (nuclear or joint family), higher economic classes and husband's higher level job, which also create self-confidence among women, have been found to be important factors at the zonal level

but not in all states. Except these, respondent's age and relation with head also play important role in enhancing the level of empowerment everywhere because of their experience for dealing the household problems.

These results may help to explain the reasons of slow growth of women empowerment level in India over a long period of time. Two most vital policies, implemented by the Government of India time to time, are with respect to education and employment of women with the view that both education and financial independence can only enhance women's empowerment. But data shows that most of the Indian women belong to backward classes with poor literacy rate. Bulk of them has medium or maximum upto secondary level education and very few have high-level education. Also these levels of education fail to instigate Indian women to opt for job; consequently, only 40 percent of the respondents are found to be involved in the job market. Majority of the employed women are engaged in skilled unskilled manual jobs, and are either illiterate or just literate or have primary level literacy. They are mainly forced to take the job because of poverty. By contributing to the family expenditure, they would have acquire the decision-making right in the family matters.

Rest of the employees who are few in number with medium or high-level education are mainly engaged in middle order jobs and very few are found in high-level jobs. Of highly educated employed women set, about 64 percent are found to be engaged in high level jobs. Therefore it can be concluded that even higher education failed to attract Indian women for job.

With sincere efforts in taking educational and employment generation policies since first five year plan, till 2005-2006, female population from

relatively poor households, those do not have appropriate level of education also have taken the opportunity of employment with low level jobs to get rid of poverty. Low proportion of women having spending right indicate that better employment opportunities and education policies have not taken care of the essential steps to bring about a radical structural transformation required for empowering women in true sense. The achievement rate has not reached up to the expected level even at the regional level.

It may be suggested in the conclusion that the effects of any investment in enhancing the empowerment should be assessed in terms of empowerment outcomes as well as development outcomes. Achieving the empowerment only by contributing money to family expenditure does not automatically empower women just as with other interventions, like as education which is lacking in India. Education plays a vital role in changing the behavioural pattern of women, in removing the norms of the patriarchal society regarding women and raises the socio-economic and cultural status of a family leading to recognize the women's position within the family as well as in the society.

Women's exposure to media plays fairly significant role on their empowerment as it enhances one's awareness about self and surrounding thereby generating self-confidence among them. As majority of women have some sort of media exposure because of the influence of audio-visual medium, television (81 percent), they have become aware about the outside world. Therefore, formulating of effective strategies considering all constraints faced by the target population should be done and media can help to make the facilities available to the target groups.

NFHS 3 provide data at household level only; therefore women's political empowerment cannot be assessed from this data. In fact, women's political autonomy is considered as an important factor because this factor can open enhanced opportunity structure for them. Both advantageous opportunity structure and their won agency can increase their empowerment to a great extent. If any survey/study covers the issues like women's financial and political empowerment along with their mobility freedom at India and its state level, only then a complete picture of women empowerment can be assessed which is in dire need. Besides, instead of concentrating only on women empowerment if both female and male empowerment can be assessed, then one can have an idea about women's real level of empowerment.