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## AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEGAL AWARENESS IN RURAL AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF GUNTUR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

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### Abstract

Women empowerment and economic development are interlinked where on one hand development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between women and men while on the other hand empowering women can benefit development. Empowerment of women is an important issue in current economic situation women empowerment is gaining importance in the world, women education and empowerment is very much needed for the economic growth of a country. The current condition of women remains unsatisfactory, with gender inequality continuing to violate human dignity and basic human rights. This has become a major global issue in human development. Law, being dynamic, must evolve to meet the changing needs of society. Therefore, individuals must stay informed about legal developments to protect their interests and uphold the purpose of law. Without legal awareness, especially among women, it is difficult to ensure empowerment and national progress. Legal education and awareness are essential tools for building an informed and just society. In India, the increasing cases of violence against women and girls highlight the urgent need to promote legal awareness and foster a legal culture among all citizens. This present research paper includes both doctrinal and empirical methods. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources, focusing on the importance of legal awareness for all, with special attention to women in Guntur district, particularly in Ponnur and Tutturu mandal's of Andhra Pradesh, India. Out of 325 rural women, 216 responded to the study through questionnaires and direct interactions, providing valuable information to support the hypothesis of the study.

**Key words:** Women Empowerment, Legal awareness, Analysis of Data

### Introduction:

Women are an integral part of a society. Women have become equal participants in many respects at all levels of society and they play an important role in determining the destiny of a nation. Constitutional provisions serve as dynamic tools to protect the rights of the general public and indigenous people specifically. Special constitutional provisions are protective discrimination that is essential to India's tribal development rather than arbitrary discrimination. Though India is amalgamation of different castes, religions and languages, the constitutional makers, under the chairmanship of Dr. B. R. Ambedker, have made all the constitutional provisions equally for all citizens of India without any discrimination and established with a novel feature of 'unity in diversity' and changed from Sovereign, Democratic, Republic, in to Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic. The legal system of India is a sophisticated one but at present the Indian society is not proper because of low literacy and lack of awareness about personal rights and responsibilities. Lack of minimum literacy and poverty, most of the citizens of India failed to understand the importance and essence of law, legal awareness and legal culture. As citizens of great India we have succeeded partly in establishing welfare society, unity in diversity, unity and integrity, secularism and justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, that enshrined in the Preamble of Indian constitution for social life with dignity, safe and security in our mother land. Democracy would indeed be hollow if it fails to generate this spirit of brotherhood among all sections of people, feeling that they are all children of the same soil and the same mother land. It is an essential (spirit of brotherhood) feature in a country like India composed of many races, religions, languages and of culture<sup>1</sup>. Strengthening Women's active participation is crucial to any society's quick socioeconomic

1. D.D. Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, p. 23 (3rd ed. 1954).



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growth. In a society like India's, their involvement must be ensured by tangible measures that are executed at multiple levels and lead to their true empowerment. One of the notions that has evolved in relation with increasing women's standing is empowerment.

In India, women are granted exclusive constitutional rights, and special laws have been enacted by the Indian legislature to promote their development and empowerment on an equal footing with men. Today, women are demonstrating their talents across all fields and possess the capability to contribute significantly to the nation's development. However, for them to fully participate, greater protection and legal awareness are essential. Despite a relatively low literacy rate among women, legal awareness must be actively promoted through legal awareness camps and programs. Recognizing this need, the Indian Parliament enacted the **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) Act, 1987**, with the objective of spreading legal awareness and ensuring access to justice from the national level down to the district level.

### Significance of the study

Legal awareness, or public legal education, is crucial worldwide. Without knowledge of the law, individuals cannot seek legal remedies or defend their rights, often remaining silent in the face of injustice. Legal awareness empowers people to confront social evils, question authorities, and understand their legal responsibilities. In today's digital age, awareness of criminal laws is especially vital to prevent fraud and stay safe online. Literacy promotes awareness in all aspects of life, and legal awareness is key to understanding one's rights and duties. It empowers women to hold authorities accountable. A democratic country cannot succeed without legal awareness, as its success relies on informed and active citizen participation.

### Need of the study

This study highlights the need to promote legal awareness among women in the rural areas of Guntur district, specifically in Tulluru and Ponnur mandals of Andhra Pradesh. Legal awareness empowers women, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities, and contributes to building a just and welfare-based society, ultimately supporting national progress. The purpose of the study is to know the reasons particularly in case of women to remain without legal awareness through personal and collective data analyses to equip them with legal awareness to make women as meaningful and powerful citizens of India for the development in all aspects. Women, especially in rural areas, must be equipped with basic literacy so they can read, write, and understand essential information. Literacy serves as a foundation for developing legal awareness, enabling them to protect themselves from fraud, discrimination, and atrocities. With even minimal literacy, it becomes much easier to impart legal knowledge and empower them to defend their rights.

### Review of Literature

Review of related studies helps to bring clarity and broaden the knowledge base in the subject area. The review shows that many studies were conducted in India and abroad to examine the different aspects of legal awareness.

1. **Max Muller** quotes from the *srauta and grihya* sutra where it is stated that Women were not allowed to learn the sacred songs of the Vedas. There is nothing in Max Muller's writing to suggest that he considered Women to be spiritual or learned in the Vedic period.<sup>2</sup>
2. **Speier** says that Manu's code depicted changed status of Women which is characterized as "obedience to her husband is the beginning, and the middle, and the end of female duty". *speier* further states that the Women's rights were wholly ignored by the Brahmanical code because daughters and wives are often too happy to require rights.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Max Muller, Vedic Hymns, Part I: Hymns to the Maruts, Rudra, Vayu, and Vata, Forgotten Books, 2008



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3. **Randal Vicky** in her book *Women and Politics* addresses few fundamental issues relating to Women's participation in politics. *Sangha Mitra Sen Chowdhary* examined in *Women and Politics in West Bengal* the position of Women's political rights and their performance in the Legislatures particularly in *West Bengal*. *M. Rama Chander* and *K. Lakshmi* in their work on *Women and Politics* analyses Women's perceptions about politics and their voting behavior; they have also assessed

## Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives

1. To promote legal awareness among women about laws enacted for their protection.
2. To educate women on the role of courts and legal dispute resolution.
3. To help women understand and exercise their legal rights and duties.
4. To reduce gender discrimination through legal awareness.
5. To empower women to join the workforce and contribute to national development.

## Hypothesis

The present study is based on the hypothesis that legal awareness significantly contributes to the empowerment of women in rural areas. It assumes that when women are informed about their legal rights and the laws enacted for their welfare, they are more capable of protecting themselves against exploitation, asserting their rights, and participating actively in social and economic activities. The study further suggests that factors such as illiteracy, poverty, and limited access to legal resources hinder the spread of legal awareness. It is believed that through targeted legal awareness initiatives, especially in rural areas like Ponnur and Tulluru Mandal's of Guntur district, these barriers can be overcome, leading to greater gender equality and overall community development.

## Research Methodology

The present research study is designed to identify the reasons behind the lack of legal awareness among women and to explore effective mechanisms for promoting legal awareness in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, India. A qualitative approach is used to assess the level of legal awareness among women in the selected areas, while a quantitative method is employed to test the hypothesis based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study. The empirical analysis in the present study was conducted using various analytical methods such as structured questionnaires, personal interviews, open interactions, and group discussions. These tools were used to collect data and understand how legal mechanisms and frameworks can be effectively utilized to create legal awareness among women in the selected areas of the study.

## Limitation of the study

For this study, data was collected through questionnaires and direct interviews with rural women. Field visits were conducted in two mandalas i.e, **Ponnur** and **Tulluru** in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Participants were randomly selected due to time constraints and limited financial resources, so the sample does not represent the entire district. Out of 325 women approached, 216 responded to the questionnaire and interviews, while the remaining were unwilling or uninterested in participating. The collected data was analyzed and systematically presented to support the goal of empowering rural women in Guntur district through increased legal awareness. The following data is analysed by the table format.i.e.,

## Do you know about the Law?

Law is a dynamic system of rules created and enforced by authorized bodies to regulate society. It evolves to meet changing social needs and acts as an instrument to bring about social change. There are two types of social change:



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continuous (evolutionary) and discontinuous (revolutionary), with continuous change being more common. Law aims to achieve justice and equality by ensuring fair treatment, recognizing that treating unequal situations identically can lead to injustice. Through education, enforcement, and sanctions, law helps guide society toward justice and social progress.

**Table No: 1. Do you know about the existence Law?**

S. No.	Opinion, Number of Responses (216)	Number of Responses	Total %
1	Yes	189	87.75
2	No	27	12.5
	Total	216	100.00

It may be observed from the table that majority of 87.75 per cent women have not awareness about the law. However, only 12.5 per cent of people have known about law.

### Do you believe/ known as the law is an instrument for social change?

Law helps people live peacefully and orderly. It reflects society's complexity and drives social change. In India, the constitution guides this change. Law governs behavior and aims for justice fair treatment based on different situations. Current remedies are limited; a new system promoting gender justice and equality is needed for women's dignity and safety.

**Table No.: 2 Do you believe/ known as the law is an instrument for social change?**

S. No.	Opinion, Numbers of Responses (216)	No. of Responses	Total %
1	Yes	183	84.72
2	No	33	15.27
	Total	216	100.00

It may be observed that majority of 84.72 per cent of women community pinioned that law will not bring changes in the social activities. Only 15.27 per cent of women pinioned that law will bring any changes in the society. Because they do not understand the law and legal issues, they are unaware of legal provisions.

### Do you have legal awareness?

Legal awareness empowers individuals by increasing their understanding of the law. It promotes legal culture and helps adapt laws to society's changing needs. As a form of social consciousness, legal awareness shapes beliefs and attitudes about law, guiding behavior and protecting rights within society.

**Table No:3 Do you have legal awareness?**

S. No.	Opinion, Number of Responses (216)	No. of Responses	Total %
1	Yes	38	82.41
2	No	178	17.59
	Total	216	100.00

It may be observed from the table that majority of 82.40 % of women said that they do not have legal awareness. However, 17.60 % of women have awareness/known about legal awareness.



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## Do you know the enactments exclusively made for women welfare by the Indian parliament?

Public-aware societies strive toward many goals, drawing inspiration from those already achieved. Despite progress, women still face issues like illiteracy, superstitions, unequal pay, child marriage, dowry, and trafficking. Constitutional provisions and state policies aim to empower women, but much of the progress is due to women's own struggles. In 2001, the Indian government introduced the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, promoting equal access to health, education, employment, and safety. Articles 38, 39, and 42 of the Constitution support these efforts, ensuring just work conditions and maternity relief under the Directive Principles of State Policy.

**Table No: 4 Do you know the enactments exclusively made for women welfare by the Indian parliament?**

S. No	Opinion, Number of Respondents (216)	Yes %	No %	Total %
1	Maternity Benefit Act	28 12.96	188 87.03	216 100.00
2	Equal Remuneration Act	21 9.73	195 90.27	216 100.00
3	National Commission for Women	04 1.85	212 98.14	216 100.00
4	Commission on the status of the women	17 7.88	199 92.12	216 100.00
5	Hindu succession Act 1956	38 17.6	178 82.40	216 100.00
6	Prohibition of child marriage Act 2006	06 2.77	210 97.22	216 100.00

From the above table, it is evident that the highest per cent of women (98.14) not aware of National Commission for Women . The second highest percent (97.22) of women are not Prohibition of child marriage Act 2006). Above 92.12 % of women not known about commission on the status of the women, it is also observed that only less than 90.27%, and 87.3% of women have not awareness regarding equal remuneration Act and maternity benefit Act,1961, respectively.

## Do you know the benefits of legal awareness?

**Legal literacy** is a powerful tool for bringing about **qualitative change at the grassroots level**. It has been observed that a better understanding of laws enables people to function more effectively in various aspects of life. In many cases, the **failure to implement laws** has resulted in significant losses for the intended beneficiaries. Legal awareness programs play a vital role in educating people about their **fundamental rights**, empowering them to claim their **legal entitlements, benefits, and privileges** as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. Ultimately, legal literacy helps individuals live with **dignity and confidence** as responsible citizens of the country.

**Table No: 5 Do you know the benefits of legal awareness?**

S. No.	Opinion, Number of Responses (216)	No. of Responses	Total %
1	Yes	24	11.12
2	No	192	88.88
	Total		100.00



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It is evident from the above table that 88.88 % of the people don't know the importance of legal awareness and only less than 11.12 % of people have known the benefits of legal awareness respectively.

### Do you feel that there is need of legal awareness programmes for women?

Legal awareness programmes are essential, especially for women, to help them understand their rights and protections under the law. Many are unaware of legal remedies available to them in cases of discrimination, violence, or injustice. These programmes empower women to seek justice, protect themselves, and participate more actively in society, contributing to gender equality and community development.

**Table No: 6 Need of legal awareness programmes for women?**

S. No.	Opinion, Number of Responses (216)	No. of Responses	%
1	Yes	196	90.75
2	No	20	9.25
	Total	2500	100.00

From above table survey of data observed that the majority of 90.75 per cent of the rural women have positive opinion towards the need of legal awareness programmes. Only 9.25 per cent of the members are pinioned that there is no need of legal awareness programmes in society. Hence the legal awareness programmes should be conducted among the women to create legal awareness regarding legal issues.

### Major findings of the data

Out of the total respondents, a significant 82.4% lack legal awareness, indicating that the majority of people are not familiar with legal rights, provisions, or processes. Only 17.6% of the participants are aware of legal issues, which shows that a small portion of the population understands the law and its implications. This gap highlights the urgent need for increased legal education and awareness programs to empower more individuals with knowledge about their rights and the legal system. Improving legal awareness can help people make informed decisions, seek justice, and contribute to a more just and equitable society. According to the findings, **90.75% of the women** expressed the need for **legal awareness programmes** to support their development and active participation in society. In contrast, only **9.25% of women** did not see the need for such programmes, largely due to a **lack of interest or complete ignorance** about the importance of legal awareness. When people are ignorant about the existence of law, such people will have no scope to have legal awareness. The analysis of the table majority of the members of the women community has helpful to the legal awareness programmers. Only less women community they have not aware on law and importance of legal awareness. Almost women community they said that legal awareness programmes have always need to the people for the society development. The present empirical study reveals that most women in the sample survey lack awareness of the laws enacted by Parliament for their empowerment and protection against gender discrimination. Legal awareness is essential for all women literate or illiterate, urban or rural—to understand their rights and the constitutional and legal provisions made for their welfare and freedom.

### Conclusion and suggestion of the study

Many women remain unaware of the provisions of the Indian Constitution and the special laws enacted by Parliament for their welfare and empowerment. Although the **National Legal Services Authority Act, 1987** was introduced to promote legal awareness across the country, its benefits have yet to reach several regions, especially rural areas. Additionally, **illiteracy and poverty** continue to be major barriers to legal awareness among women, preventing them from accessing justice and understanding their rights. In India women are given exclusive constitutional rights and special enactments are being made by the Indian legislature for their development and empowerment equally along with men. Now women have been exhibiting their talent in all fields. Therefore, Legal awareness creates legal culture to the people as how to live in the society without violation of law of the land which helps to establish welfare society and Legal Awareness can



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empower people as well as women to demand justice. The present study emphasizes the critical need to create legal awareness among women in selected rural areas of Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Empowering women with knowledge of their legal rights and protections is essential not only for their individual growth but also for fostering social justice and gender equality in these communities. By enhancing legal literacy, women can better safeguard themselves against exploitation, discrimination, and social injustices. This empowerment contributes significantly to the socio-economic development of the rural population and, ultimately, the advancement of the nation as a whole. Therefore, it is essential to create legal awareness among women, especially in rural areas, so they can understand their rights, protect themselves from injustice, and actively participate in the development of their communities and the nation.

The present empirical study clearly highlights that there is a **significant lack of legal awareness** among rural women in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Most women surveyed were unaware of the constitutional provisions and special enactments made for their protection, empowerment, and equality. This lack of awareness leaves them vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and denial of their legal rights. The findings strongly indicate the **urgent need for legal aid and legal awareness programmes**, especially targeted at rural women. Immediate and sustained efforts through legal literacy camps, awareness drives, and accessible legal support systems are essential to empower women, ensure justice, and promote inclusive development in rural areas.