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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. "An essential condition to eradicate poverty is to bring women empowerment."
Substantiate this statement with suitable examples. (250 words)

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Approach

- Give a brief introduction about the status of women.
- Highlight the link between poverty alleviation and women empowerment.
- Comment upon the various challenges in achieving women empowerment and give some steps to empower women.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

- "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." — Swami Vivekananda.
- However, poverty eradication and improving the status of women remained a major challenge for the Government and the policymakers in India. About 26 per cent still live in a status of acute poverty. Even though the number changes from state to state, poverty in India is considered to be a mass problem, especially in rural areas.

Body

Women Empowerment is needed for poverty alleviation

- Women constitute **almost half of the country's population**, therefore improving their condition in the country can immensely contribute to poverty alleviation.
- Women's empowerment plays a catalytic role towards the achievement of transformational economic, political and social changes required for **sustainable development**.
- Empowerment of women and eradication of poverty is very critical for the development of the country since it will enhance both the **quality and the quantity of human resources available** for development. Failing in these efforts will deprive both men and women in getting the fruits of development.
- Many reports and studies suggest that women typically spend their income on **food and healthcare for children**, which is in sharp contrast to men, who spend a higher proportion of their income for personal needs.
- Increasing gender equality and women's empowerment, as a means of **accelerating growth and development**, is an end in itself. It allows individual women and girls to enjoy their full human rights, and it leads to more **stable economies and stronger societies**.
- Access to family planning and maternal health services, as well as education for girls, typically results in **improved economic opportunity** for women and **lower fertility**.

- Healthy, educated girls with equal access to opportunities can grow into strong, smart women who can take on **leadership roles** in their countries. This will help in having a better view of **women perspective in the government policies** which will in turn help in poverty alleviation.
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that if women farmers had the same access to tools and credit as men, agricultural output in 34 developing countries would rise by an estimated average of up to 4%, translating to up to 150 million fewer hungry people.

Challenges to women empowerment: There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India.

- **Education:** The literacy gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional training which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.
- **Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.
- **Professional Inequality:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.
- **Morality and Inequality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia and Africa.
- **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

Steps to be taken for women empowerment:

- **Social:**
 - **Health:** Improvement in the health indicators of women can significantly contribute to overall health of family and the new borns. Since the significant amount of earnings of underprivileged are spent on medical treatment, improved women's health and their newborns can drastically reduce household expenditure.
 - **Education** is the major tool for eliminating poverty. Educated women are more sensitive toward their children's education and contribute more to their development.

- **Economic**
 - **Equal Wages:** Wage disparity between men and women has serious implications on poverty. Equal wages for females would ensure increased household income and productive expenditure on health and nutrition of the whole family.
 - **Skill Development:** Women are significantly involved in collecting minor forest produce and household based industries. Enhancing their skills can directly reduce their economic dependence on their husbands, which in-turn will increase their decision making power in productive expenditure and family matters.
- **Political:**
 - A society where the **female voice is sought and heard**, where the principles of equity (fairness) and equality (opportunity) co-exist, is a more powerful and effective society.
 - Increasing due **representation of women** in decision making at grassroot level can effectively help better targeting government poverty alleviation programs.

Conclusion

- Poverty and empowerment issues cannot be adequately addressed where only half of the population is positively and actively engaged, therefore actively engaging women as the driver for bringing positive change and eliminating poverty from the country is the key to focus on.
- However, the government in its recent social sector program has effectively engaged women centric efforts like rural sanitation through Swachh Bharat, improving health outcomes through **POSHAN Abhiyan** and **UJJWALA Scheme** etc.