Original Research Paper History

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA " A HISTORICAL APPROACH."

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KEYWORDS :

Women empowerment is not a new concept it is quite a well –known concept in India and around the world. Women all over the world have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since begging of history. It is much raised question and discussion , why it is necessary why it is discussed ,why women felt they were discriminated , why women were not given equal respect and equality and faith in society. Even in modern advance world they are still fight for their rights. Why do we need to discuss the women empowerment? Why they were not get respect in family and society like boys, why they were forced to get marriage at younger age. All these questions raise the need to pay more attention to the women empowerment. If we realized the aim of women empowerment it will become an indirect force to empower entire family. It influences the entire society. It acts like dynamic source of knowledge. Which brings social change and better world? To bring this change media and cinema played vital role , if these tools played its role properly to educate all the women in a country like India it will become a developed country instead of it is called developing nation . Before going to discussing all these things it's right thing to analyze the definition of women empowerment, the causes for the women inequalities in India ,and the efforts made by the Indian leaders who tried to emancipation of women , and the role of present governments and other organizations and the results of women empowerment.

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grip of social, economical, political, cast gender- based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women should be able to express her thoughts and imaginations freely and create self confidence and to negotiate for power to gain asserts and decision making.

Empowerment is a multi dimensional process which enables individuals or a group of individuals to realize the identity and powers in all spears of life.

Webster dictionary defines the word empowerment that the situation of authority to be powerful. Empowerment means a process which gives authority to women to challenge any situation. Therefore the term empowerment has multi dimensional , and focused to describe the process wherein a group or individuals are able to enhance their status in society and allows them to participate in overall growth. In other word it is an active multi dimensional process which enables them to realize their identity, position, power in all spheres of life. This freed them from the all kinds of customs, beliefs, faiths, and evil practices that prevailed in the society.

Empowerment means equal status to women. It provides greater access to knowledge and resources greater autonomy in decision making greater ability to plan, and free from the shackles imposed on them by custom belief and practice. Women empowerment occurs with in sociology, psychological, political cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community. Women empowerment is an ongoing process which enhances women's abilities to change the structure and ideologies that keep them subordinate. It also acts as process of creating awareness and capacity building.

The struggle supported by many men and women who have been outraged at injustice against women and the consequences upon the society. The goal of women empowerment is simply providing strength to them. Empowerment of women particularly in rural women has become an important issue in the strategies of balanced development with social justice. Economic empowerment results in women's ability to influence or make a right decision increase self confidence better status and role in household.

The position of women in India, a historical analysis:

Historical evidence proves that the position of women in Indian had been deteriorated since its inception of Indian history. During rig-Vedic period women enjoyed equal respect liberty along with men in society. She is the member of public offices like Sabah and samity. Since the inception of the later Vedic civilization women were denied the rights to education and widow remarriage, denied the rights of inheritance and ownership of property. The emergence of Verna system introduced by Manu led to the rise of supremacy of some Verna men over the other members of the society as well as women. Though women had given respect in family, several restrictions were imposed on the rights of women and other members of society out of these Varna's. Some Verna's were excluded from society they were give the status of slaves to the upper Verna's. Then these Verna's fell in the fold of they were supreme than the other fellow beings, they were given special privileges, and rights, they monopolize certain profession which were treated as high position in the society. Many people were denied to get education , education was the only privilege of few Verna's, women were not allowed to get education , her duties were specifically mentioned she begot the children and patronized them , serve men and fulfill his desires , she was not allowed to come out of the house . During Gupta period, the status of women immensely deteriorated. Dowry becomes an institution.

During the Muslim period evil practices crept into society, to protect the child from the atrocities of Muslim invaders child marriage, and sati system, parda system, came into being. Women were restricted to the kitchens; they were not allowed to wonder in the public without the support of male members. Untoucability crept into society they were not allowed into the main village.

But during the British period, many social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eswara Chandra vidyasagar , and jyothiba phule ,veerasalingam, Gurajada apparao started agitation for the empowerment of women. The efforts of raja Ram Mohan Roy led to the abolition of sati. By the efforts of vidyasagar , and Veerasalingam and Gurajada Apparao widow remarriage act was passed. Later on Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru advocated for the women rights. As a result of their concrete efforts, the status of women in social life, economic and political life began to elevate in the society.

The efforts of the constitutional makers for the empowerment of women:

The constitutional fathers based on certain ideals championed the women empowerment; many social, economic and political provisions were incorporated in the Indian constitution. The Constitution of India guarantees to all women, Equality [Article,14], No discrimination by the State [Article 15(1)], Equality of

Opportunity [Article 16], Equal work [Article 39(D)], Renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51(a),(c)]. The Constitution also allows the State to make special provision in favour of women and children [Article 15(3)], and securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief [Article 42].

Women in India had given assurance that they were given equal priority along with men to participate in areas such as education, politics, sports, media, art and culture, service and science and technology. Though constitution gave equal rights to women along with men , the age old deep rooted patriarchal mentality of the Indian society , women are still victimized, humiliated , tortured , exploited, women are still subjected to the discrimination of social, economic and education fields. They were meted with ill treatment.

In addition to this they are facing so many problems such as Gender based violence ie rape, female foeticide and infanticide, wife battering, dowry deaths, sati, women trafficking and sale of girls, financial exploitation, sexual exploitation of working women and female students, honour killings etc. This is the order of the present day. If any society wants to achieve comprehensive development of the society half of its citizens ie women also should be given equal treatment and opportunities. Our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Lal Nehru has rightly said" The status of women indicates the character of country". Due to the efforts of the social reformers and UNO, all democratic countries in the world have taken steps for the improvement of women's position in the society. Laws were enacted in the direction of women equality and opportunities were created for their upliftment.

Drawbacks of women empowerment Biased perspective:
One of the most obstacles in securing the women empowerment in India is the biased perspective. The discrimination against the girl child and women begins struggle from her birth itself. The birth of boy is preferred over the girls, it leads to the female infanticide it's become a common practice throughout India. Thus the Indian girl child confront struggle from the birth to death.

Patriarchal family system:
The patriarchal form of family system prevailed in the Indian society leads to the domination of male members in the family and the society. It across self proclaimed cast lords posed as the protectors of guardians of unjust UN ethical traditions. They put burden of traditions, customs, culture, and honor on the shoulders of women. Ultimately this leads to rise of incidences of honor killings in the name of cast, religion, region to show the male domination in the society.

Loophole in the legal system.
Though there were number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence , there was a significant increase in the atrocities against women like ,rape, extortion , acid attacks, women trafficking etc. The delay in capturing the culprits, delay in the legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of judicial system.

Economic backwardness:
A woman constitutes large number of the work force but majority of them in the UN organized sector**.** It is estimated that 75% of all work force in rural areas much number of workers are in agriculture. Women constitute 40% of the agriculture force and this percentage is rising. The number of women headed households in the agricultural sector is also increasing. There has been a failure in transforming the available women base into human resources. This hampered not only thee economic development of women but also of the country as a whole.

The government efforts for women empowerment:
Even though these challenge were faced by women while securing empowerment recent governments took several measures to step up for the upliftment of women to equal footing with men in spear of economic, social, Educational, political, health and judicial sectors, the following paragraphs emphasized these initiatives.

Economic empowerment is to create a situation where women become economically independent and self-reliant through training, employment and income generation activities Economic empowerment leads to social empowerment both may have to go simultaneously to empower women and there by realize their full potential. If economic development means improvement in levels of living and life styles through education, skill development and employment, women must be part of this process. In fact, inclusive development as targeted in India must include women since poverty is acute for women in rural India.

Government policies form the basis for programs and schemes which provide the direction and describing the components of inputs that go into them. They determine the allotment of the funds to different schemes, its components and also spatial spread of the programmes. Unless these policies are engendered, it cannot be hoped that the programs and the schemes that emerge from this will be gender sensitive. Therefore, it is very essential that all policies of the Government from its very beginning from the formulation stage be thoroughly examined from a gender perspective. The forth going paragraphs describe the various possibilities and potential of engendering some important national and state policies.

Government focused special attention to the Poverty alleviation programs they should mainly focus on women as they are economically more disadvantaged than men and poor. These alleviation programs should be geared and designed to meet women's needs with strengthening of SHGs, easy access to cheap credit, equal wages for equal work and a judicious mix of cash and non cash in the wages etc. with the advent of mega poverty alleviation schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, more and more women are come forward to work. It is important that the work place should be made safe from harassment and woman friendly with adequate provision sanitation, drinking water and crèche facilities.

Monetary policy has to be reviewed form a gender angle, especially in the case of credit and loan facilities and easy access of women to financial instruments and attractive saving options. In this context the spread of private micro credit lending instruments needs to be carefully regulated to ensure that women and SHGs are not exploited through high interest rates.

Government also reviewed the educational policies, Education of women is crucial for social empowerment. Gender sensitive educational system has to be created. Efforts have to be made to increase enrolment of women at all levels of education. Special attention is required to retain girl students and improve the quality of their education. It is said that if the father in the family is educated he alone is educated but if the mother is educated the entire family is educated. Thus education of women is crucial for their empowerment.

Further, special attention has to be paid for ensuring access to affordable health care of women. It is reported that 53% of women are malnutrition in India causing infant and maternal mortality and other health disorders. Further intra household discrimination has to be eliminated in access to food. Provision of safe drinking water, sanitation and housing are the other areas which help in technological empowerment of women by, particularly in rural areas.

In India political empowerment is initiated by the government of India through the Panchayat Raj system. 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts were passed by lok Sabah through which all the local bodies reserved 1/3 of their seats for women. Such provision was made to increase the effective participation of women in politics. Although seats are reserved for them in the Panchayats and

they get elected, their power is still restricted as it is their men that exercise all authority.

The pending of women's reservation bill which proposed to reserve 33 % of all seats in the lok sabha and in all state assemblies for women. lack of political will to empower women politically it was still under pending in the lok sabha. . Women should have access to resources, rights, and entitlements. They should be given decision –making power and due position in governance. Many states passed laws to provide reservation in employment, but denied to give political reservations. to overcome this women reservation Bill should passed as soon as possible to increase the effective participation of women in the politics of India.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, after the Nirbhaya rape case

After the occurrence of the Nirbhaya rape case, Central government appointed J.S verma, a former chief justice of India to suggest amendments to criminal law to strictly deal with sexual assault cases. The report indicated that failures on the part of the Government and Police were the root cause behind crimes against women. Major suggestions of the report included the need to review, the conflict areas, maximum punishment for rape as life imprisonment and not death penalty, clear ambiguity over control of Delhi Police etc, The Cabinet Ministers on 1 February 2013 approved for bringing an ordinance, for giving effect to the changes in law as suggested by the Verma Committee Report The ordinance was subsequently replaced by a Bill with numerous changes, which was passed by the Lok Sabha on 19 March 2013. This new Act has-expressly recognized certain act as offences which were dealt under related laws. These new offences like "Sexual Harassment" , "Acid Attack",, "Voyeurism", "Stalking" have been incorporated into the Indian Penal Code By The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013. Section 370 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been substituted with new sections, 370, 370A which deals with trafficking of person for exploitation. If a person (a) recruits, (b) transports, (c) harbours, (d) transfers, or (e) receives, a person, by using threats, or force, or coercion, or abduction, of fraud, or deception, or by abuse of power, or inducement for exploitation including prostitution, slavery, forced organ removal, etc. will be punished with imprisonment ranging from at least 7 years to imprisonment for the remainder of that person's natural life depending on the number or category of persons trafficked. Employment of a trafficked person will attract penal provision as well.

Media policy needs to be gender proactive. There is a need to encourage media to project positive images and balanced portrayal of women and girls to enable attitudinal changes. The media policy should also help in generating awareness on gender issues and concerns so that the process of societal reorientation towards creating a gender just society gets widely disseminated.

Lastly cinema and theatre also played vital role in creating awareness among the women by focussing the stories of women discrimination, the effects of the crime against women and the severity of punishments to the culprits

In conclusion, women empowerment is an essential factor for social and economic development of the country. The progress achieved in this direction so far is not that significant and sufficient. The mindset of men has to be changed, women are also has given priority in all aspects equal to the men at all levels of decision making. Top priority has to be given to Educate women, especially higher education in particular, we are all concentrate our efforts in the right direction which only liberate women from all evils then only the goal of women empowerment would be reached.