



## FEMINISM AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: A MOVEMENT IN THE MAKING

**Dr. Harapriya Samantaraya**

Reader in Home Science, P.G, Department of Home Science, Bhanja Bihar, Berhampur University, Odisha- 760007

### ABSTRACT

In contemporary Indian society women empowerment could be assumed as a product of history of the struggle of women against patriarch. Their marginalized position in society reveals the ownership and change in property relations that remain directly proportional to the degree of empowerment and autonomy. However, a woman is to be known from the ethnic cultural background to which she belongs. It's also presumed that the withdrawal of women from the process of production leads to decline of women's self-esteem that leads to a shift from bride price to dowry denigrating her position in society. The paper is based on secondary sources of published data. It has been treating three types of societies: the tribal, the agrarian rural and the Urban industrial and tries to show the position of women and its subsequent transformation. It is ascertained that the patterns of women autonomy vary considerably across tribal, rural-agrarian and urban-industrial women in terms of decision making power in selecting mate, spending money, obtaining health care and keeping dependent parents in law. No act, law and rules can transform unless it has a public proclamation. The feminism as a movement is in nascent stage, it needs many more attempts to bring change in the male mind set and women assertion for cause of equality and empowerment

### KEYWORDS :

#### Theoretical overview and review of literature:

Ever since the dawn of human civilization, there has been a struggle to liberate women from male subjugation. Feminism is an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to any woman. Feminism is a movement to seek gender equality. *Feminism in India* is a set of activities aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. As an 'ism' it is a manifestation of antipathy at the unjust treatment meted out to any woman in any context. The empowerment of women, in a sense, is making women assertive for their rights. Thus it is all about the pursuit for the rights of women. By and large, it is believed that economic determinants determine one's sociopolitical position in society. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress of an individual as well as of the country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers. The economic transition from bride price to dowry is directly proportional to the withdrawal of women from production process. Kanwar Dinesh Singh, (2004) Deshpande does not believe in destructing ideologies in the mask of modernism and feminism. On the contrary, through her character she declares that salvation is hidden in tradition. Unlike western literary feminism, her female protagonist does not indulge in radical steps to assert their individuality. Shashi Deshpande, one of the distinguished contemporary women writers of India, has established her immensity by dealing with issue of Indian women by maintaining an excellent balance between the two extremes – tradition and modernity. Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows: A Tragic Story of Strained Marital Relationships* in which for example, the individual Saru confesses to her father about her marital crisis to save herself from it. Her father advises her not to run away but to face the problem (1992). The novel provides a penetrative insight into the joint family revealing its strengths and weaknesses. Some feminist thought that the feminist movements in the west have had some influence on the women's movements in developing countries like India. Yet feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counterpart. Shashi Deshpande, attempted to prove the point that Indian feminism as reflected in the Indian fiction is a unique phenomenon that has to be valued on its own scale and should not be weighed against the scales of the western feminist literature. The human relationships between father and daughter, husband and wife and also between mother and daughter are the theme of Shashi Deshpande's novels. In all these relationships the woman occupies the central stage and significantly the narration shifts through her feminine/ feminist

consciousness. Viney Kirpal, (1996) Socialism and feminism emphasizes the ways in which discrimination against woman is manifested and how this can be resisted. The women attempted to integrate themselves into a public sphere, a male tradition and many felt a conflict of 'obedience and resistance'. She questioned, challenged the male institutions and this appeared that she violated certain social standard and ethics of the prevalent traditional society that embittered a vague sense of guilt. She challenged the male authority. 'voiced up' and protested and consequently suffered a lot inevitably for which she ended up her life tragically and yet victoriously.

One of the central questions that generated scholarly research and debate in social sciences throughout the major part of twentieth century relates to the incomplete transition in third world countries from pre-capitalists to capitalist mode of production (Mohanty 2016). After three decades of independence there was a deepening development crisis around when it was realized by many that the disillusionment with the 'trickledown' theory. During late 1970s due to the pressure of UN, Govt, India had appointed a committee and reviewed the status of women in the country. It was realized that primary data on women in the unorganized occupation was particularly non-existent. Thus, micro studies initiated wherein it was found that on women's economic role affected by modernization (Dighe 1985). It is expected that regions where patriarchy is stronger gender discrimination towards female will be more resulting in low status of women (Guha and Datta 2008). In response to the male dominance Bhasin writes that as the definition of feminism is constant like any other concept it can change because feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions (2000).

#### Historical perspective of Women participation:

Under the leadership of the political stalwarts India is popularly known to have her unbroken history and broken promises in which almost half of the country's population has been deprived of self esteem and subjected to the whims and caprices of the male dominance. During the evolutionary process of human society the equal potency and equal participation in the productive processes, except the biological uniqueness, was hardly differentiated man from women. The biological sex- frontiers are the tenets of differentiation. Then, the freedom was closely accentuated with the necessities. The extractions of surplus and greed and control over property and sex were almost non existence. Collective living was an essential tenet for defense. Caring and sharing was possibly the nucleus of living and individual in the group living was remaining

cognitively competent to be economically productive, socially liberal and politically democratic. Women's empowerment movements *per se* have not survived in authoritarian regimes based on gender subordination and ideologies of male dominance. The presence of a democratic context of leading life and living has contributed to slow progress in empowering women, particularly in South Asia. Approaches in South Asia have necessarily focused on opportunities and services rather than on political power that harvested and maintained the group solidarity among the followers.

Conceptualizations of gender discrimination and male domination have been the historic phenomena. In due course of time, the appropriation of property and women sex by men gave way to devalue the status of the women. The oversimplified but focused non-elimination of obvious oppressive practices of alienation of women from work force subsequently eroded the economic rights of women. Empowerment of women that will have lasting impacts must involve consciousness raising before the social construction of gender, which subordinates women in the family, class, caste, religion, or society, can be changed. The participation of women and the bride price go hand in hand. The events such as wife beating or dowry demands surfaced at the cost of the bride price. Three experimental approaches to empowerment in South Asia have been tried: integrated development, economic empowerment, and raising consciousness. Raising consciousness has been implemented in awareness groups and education that have led to a new consciousness, self worth, societal and gender analysis, and access to skills and information. The economic empowerment approach has relied on improving women's control over economic resources and strengthening women's economic security. Grameen Bank has provided one example of organizing women around savings and credit, income generation, and skill training activities. Integrated development approaches have encouraged women's collectives that have engaged in development and social problem resolution and formed specialized activity groups as means of mobilization of women. No one design has assured success. Identification of the poorest and most oppressed in a geopolitical area has provided an entry point for action. Women were encouraged to find a separate time and space for themselves. The three aforementioned approaches have different assumptions about the reason for women's powerlessness: greater poverty and lower access to resources, economic vulnerability, and subordination within patriarchal societies and socioeconomic inequalities.

A period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. Accurately measure empowerment has a set of core dimensions. Eight dimensions (culture, trust, accountability, Leadership, ability, commitment, responsibility, and communication) were put forth as the most appropriate to measure empowerment. Contribution of subject experts with knowledge and experience in the area of motivation, empowerment and autonomy could be useful and these can be put under three categories Viz; tribal women, agrarian rural women and urban industrial women.

### Overview of Indian women

India is a land of multi ethnic communities with various types of customs, traditions and practices. Each ethnic has unique identity and has cohesion among its members. Therefore collective consciousness reigns big in cultural reality. Tribal, rural and urban mass often worship same deity and believe common fertility cult. Tradition highlights women with reverence. Contrary to the ethics women suffer a lot that ranges pre-birth period to the stage of last breath. With regard to the sexual assault and such other inhuman incidents there is an increasing trend observed crimes against women (State police record 2017). In patriarchal system of society like ours women are unsafe badly both at home and in work site/office. Social reformists fought and brought legal and socio-cultural changes against sexual violence, sexual harassment at work

place, domestic violence, female infanticide, *sati daha*- a type of ultraistic suicide, dowry menace, veil or *parda pratha*, bride burning, wife beating and many kinds of kinds of discriminatory practices in terms of food culture, dress code, mobility, entertainment, education, decision making, property ownership and use, inheritance of name and title etc. To safe guard the interest of women and protect from exploitation and discrimination there are many constitutional Acts and amendments, legal provisions and constituted commissions, however, these could offer any positive impact. Women image builders are often look down upon. Derogatory terms are also being used for those who act barriers to social evils. Stories, riddles, jokes are many that perpetuate the male chauvinist ideas and ideals.

In Indian society a stronger preference for son is an insidious matter which affects the attitude and behavior with respect to children (Basu 1989, Dasgupta 1987, Kishore 1995 and Nag 1991). The tribal society is a society of communities. Even when individual identity of women in tribal communities is subordinate to the community identity, except inheritance of property in patriarchal tribal families, the amount of liberty and freedom of choice of marriage divorce, income and expenditure is much more. Things are changing as the educated tribal families imitate the life style of rural and urbanites and invite similar socio-economic problems as the rural and urban people encounter. What changes occurred across three generations of women has been studied by Verma (1985) where he says the desire of freedom increases across generations. While second generation of women bothers on duties and responsibilities, the third generation makes adjustment in social relationship. However, the author preferred to mention the assertive features of the urban women as an attempt to support feminism. Singh in her sociological analysis based on sample survey said that significant changes occurred in female work force during 1970s onwards. Similarly the census data also reveals the increased economic participation of women in work force in various occupations. The literacy of rural and urban women has increased significantly. This implies that higher the education greater is the awareness.

To overcome psychosocial trauma it was thought to adopt various means to change the age old mind set of male members and empower women through inculcation of education and skill. There are programs organized on gender sensitizations in public places to generate awareness and help people internalize the position of both men and women in order to treat respect each other as equals. The basics of life and living of women in home setting, irrespective of tribal, rural and urban, remains subordinate to their counterpart. The genesis of gender is attributing to different forms of women exploitation, discrimination and suppression. Resources monopoly of men is being challenged by women and their protest ranged from silence to organized movement. The backwardness of recently decolonized nation like ours is attributed to the tenets of colonial and semi colonial appendages having bundle of contradictions across ethnic groups, income categories, educational level, degree of assertiveness, caste and class hierarchy, social distance between *dalits* and *non-dalits*, pampered and pauperized, bourgeois and proletariat, gentry and peasantries, industrialist and labors.

### Dimension of feminism:

Feminism and women empowerment are inseparable entities. Gender relationships are important components of the social structure of any society which is based on a cultural rather than biological distinction. The enculturation process is shaping female through socialization to be feminine. It is known that social organization and ideology are determined by the economic base of the community. While dealing with control over resources three levels such as individual, interpersonal and institutional have been examined To explain how woman once powerful, in the process of history accepted the role of subordination as housewife, mother as well as expendable commodity, whether sold off to an unknown or a sources of dowry or her husband's family and subjected to the ideological role of the State policies. In India where women are marginalized, exploited and discriminated and are often taken for a

ride women empowerment is an eye-wash, a window-dressing to avoid/ suppress right base movement of women. Unlike any other 'isms' India, feminism- the real life situation differs both in its essence and appearance based on the interaction between men and women and between the State and the society. It concludes that no change in technology and human resource development can empower women for equal footing unless there is a change in mind set of the men and feministic movement would contribute and offer better alternatives to augment empowerment of women.

More than a century ago, Marx and Engels used a term called 'spontaneous community' that was marked by shared production and immediate distribution of the produce according to the need (Marx and Engels 1979). Conceptualization of peculiar and diverse forms of primitive communal society for Marx and Engels was not based on serious knowledge (Hobsbawm 1965). Nevertheless, closer looks at the works of Marx and Engels revealed many assume that can profitably be used to understand the forms of societies in the process of development. Of several attributes the emphasis Marx and Engels gave on communal ownership was a distinguishing tenet. Group living was a precondition for appropriation and use of soil, water and other natural resources (Marx and Engels 1979). Since individual was powerless, the social organization was repressing its embers in a dictatorial manner (Pathy 1982) Thus, individual was subservient to the desire of the community. The individual sacrifice for the cause of group living was the basic function of social solidarity. Exchange of labor, goods and services for sustainable living was the essence of human social organization.

#### **Acts and commissions in favor of Women in India:**

There are many acts in favor of women as follows: The immoral traffic (prevention) act 1956, Dowry prevention act 1961, incidence women representation prohibition act 1986, commission of sati (prevention) act 1987, protection of women from domestic violence 2005, Sexual harassment of women at work place 2013, Married women property act 1874, Workmanship compensation act 1923, Child marriage restraint act 1929, Payment wage act 1936, Employer's liability act 1936, minimum wage act 1948, employee state insurance act 1948, Hindu marriage act 1956, civil rights act 1956, maternity benefit act 1961, medical termination of pregnancy act 1971, national commission of women act 1990, human right act 1993, prenatal diagnostic technique, prohibition act (sex determination) 1994, family court act 1984, prohibition of child marriage act 2006, legal service atrocity act 1987, mental health act 1987, equal remuneration act 1976, contract labor (regulation and prohibition) act 1970, foreign marriage act 1969, Hindu succession act 1956, code of criminal procedure 1973, Plantation labor act 1951 amended 1986, Muslim women protection of right on divorce) act 1986, Bidi workers act 1966, human right act 1993 amended 2000, interstate migrant workman act 1997 and many other acts commissions and rules as supportive elements for feminism.

Women reservation in bus services, provision of care centers in corporate houses, Allotment of forest land under forest right act 2006 and the land rights in the name of women alone to in joint *patta* of women husband and wife, recent entry in defense services and in recruitment of pilot officers in aviation department, concessional benefit in extension of loan for women entrepreneurs, free education and free distribution of dress, reading materials, bicycles and computers for girl students, State sponsored scholarship to meritorious girl students, construction of working women's hostels, provision of 108 number vehicles for transport facilities to the expectant and sick mothers to the nearby hospitals / public health care centers, police patrolling on roads and other crowded places for safety of women, extension services for safe institutional delivery and incentives and motivational inputs through media etc are a few women centric protection and promotional support systems.

#### **Levels of women identity:**

The levels of women identity can be viewed in three areas such as

Individual personal, Interpersonal Institutional of three categories namely tribal, rural and urban. The segmenting the women in three categories have been for analytical purpose. There has been a continuity of these three (Bailey 1990) All identities are relational. With the reference to the subject or the object the identity of something is expressed. For women, the men being the counterparts are often cited for many sociopolitical reasons. In the history of mankind the process of appropriation of economic and political power of men therefore did not allow the women to figure in documents. One can realize the male mind set when it comes to refer the sir name of a child. Similarly, the patriarchy terms like his master's voice, man power, one man show, master piece etc testify the suppressed identity of women.

#### **Tribal Society,**

Tribal society is animistic and concept of property is qualitatively different from non-tribal. Communal property rights and Common resource use and usufructuary rights figure prominent among the tribal communities. Barring a few matriarch societies like Kuruchas of south and Khasis of Northeast India, almost all tribal communities are patriarchal. They practice patrilocal marriage and count their descent through male line of ancestry. Unlike rural Indian society, the tribal society does not differentiate a girl from a boy and treats almost equal to both the sexes. With coming up of age the socialization pattern provide them sufficient input to deal with the individual, interpersonal and institutional demands. However, compared to the rural agrarian communities and urban women they enjoy lot of freedom.

#### **Rural Society.**

Rural society in India is caste composed and arranged hierarchal. The pollution and purity concept fixes the caste position in the local area. The land-relations determine the interpersonal and inter group status. To understand the internal structural dynamics the individual personal, interpersonal. Institutional agrarian society needs to be studied. In a study it is concluded that withdraws women from work force and there is emergence of dowry. Patriarchy tends to be strong in agrarian societies, with their tight knit household and family relationships and communities playing strong roles in ensuring that patriarchal norms are followed. (Heyer 2016). Indian rural agrarian society traditionally the women were supposed to work within four walls of joint family and remain engaged in child rearing, cooking, cleaning and general up keep of the household. Apart from acts and legal provisions that favor women, with the change in education and Govt, non-Govt delivers' intervention in form of skill development formation of self-help groups, formation of federations brought a change in women socioeconomic structure. A woman's esteem, confidence and courage increased. The then voiceless are no more remain silent. Remaining mum was treated as a form of protest for a long time. There were sporadic resistance at home and outside but women were force to accept whatever inflicted up on them. Recently in certain cases they have shown their power of regimentation to fight against the ill treatment of drunken husband. The Penchant Raj contributed a lot in empowering them or representing the public. Yet the male members of the women political representatives play decisive role and control the finance and family human resource. Women participation in decision making is now in transition. They are yet miles to go to fight and become assertive. The stubborn male members of the family come on their way.

#### **Urban Society**

In urban the employment is available mostly by the private sectors and unorganized informal sectors. Young compete to climb professional adders are subjected to market driven jobs with high responsibility and professional tension. The individual employee tries it hard to excel in performance since the he/ she knows that the principle of heir and fire works on the basis of perform or parish in private organizations. The uncertainty of sources of livelihood is not guaranteed. Individual personal,

The interpersonal relations are professional bound at the work place and friendship bond remains active both at home and at place of work. The young with child live not to keep parents with them, however, they need their presence when they live with child are children because they are only reliable to look after the children and the property. Since parents are away at home attached to their natives who live at a distance, at the time of need, only the colleagues or friends expected to support for immediate events. . Thus, to keep the relation functional the reciprocal exchange of gift and supports are to be maintained. In order to maintain relative alive with some amount of amicability the urban couple feel restless. The job type and work scheduled among the urban working employees is non-compromised as there is a threat to job security. The institutional framework of the employment is subjected to time and space and the demand of the boss.

#### **Economic empowerment of women:**

Education is one of the major pillars of development. With the rise in education, the women can use their acquired skill and knowledge and use group cohesion as spring board for progress. Poverty eradication, micro credit, women and economy, globalization, women and agriculture, women and industry, support services , education, health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, housing and shelter, environment, science and technology women in difficult circumstances, violence against women, rights of girls child, mass media, Friedman's framework of empowerment technological empowerment, new model of rural women empowerment Govt. policy anon gender equality .The feminists are misinterpreted as bra-burner, misogynist and family destroying women (Bhasin and Khan 2000).The emancipation and liberation of women as a threat to their counterpart is being perceived by the patriarchy society. The media high lights the women oppression and exploitation. For their market they highlight the negative issues like sex scandals more than anything. This denigrates the female. Urban situation keep women running to meet the needs of the family at home and duties at office. The work load increases with the increase of family members and so when new born and aged are there in family. Type of occupation, the timing of work and communication put women in difficulties. The safety and security matters are not enough and they are targeted when seen alone. Due to self esteem many wrongful events against them are kept concealed. Even the court takes the side of the men in most genuine cases of sexual harassment.

#### **Conclusions:**

Efforts to help themselves through vocational training, employment opportunities and social groups activities, the society needs to consider the potential unintended consequences that victimize women, such as an increased risk of domestic violence wife beating etc. The study findings suggest that the effectiveness of anti-dowry laws may be limited without additional strategies that mobilize women, families and communities to challenge the widespread acceptance of dowry and to promote gender equity. Longitudinal studies are needed to elucidate the complex causal relationships between 'love' marriages and domestic violence. The tribal family size is small like that of the urban families. The difference is that among the tribal the nuclear family is a part of tradition as after marriage they establish the family and in urban small size of the family is due to economic compulsion and to support the parents or the parents in law members live with the urban family mostly when the family has been blessed with child or children. Keeping the member of the parental family is the sources of conflict between urban spouses. The rural family traditionally remain joint mostly due to land relations and recently due to land segmentation it gave way t for the nuclear family yet the feeling of jointness exist in considerable number of families. This is because the likelihood resources are no more pulled into one head but the produce of the land is being separately distributed. Thus the size of the family moves like a pendulum between tribal to urban with a small gap in-between the rural agrarian family structures. The reformative and protective acts, law and rules have sharper teeth to bite provided it has a public proclamation. The feminism as a

movement is in the making. Many attempts are yet to surface to empower women and women assertion and also bring changes in the male mind set for cause of equality and uphold civil rights and constitutional rights.

#### **References:**

1. Bailey. F. G.1990 Tribe Caste and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa, Oxford University press, New Delhi.
2. Bhasin, K.and Khan, N.S. 2000. Some observations on feminism and its relevance in South Asia , Paul Press, New Delhi
3. Bapuji,B.R.1993 Anatomy of modern society Excerpts from Marx and Engels, T. R. Publications, Hyderabad
4. Basu, A.M. 'Is discrimination in food really necessary for explaining sex differential in childhood mortality' Jou. Population studies Vol. 43 No 2 Pp 193-210
5. Chatterjee, A.P.2008 Information technology and women empowerment in ed P. Arunachalam inclusive growth in India serials publications New Delhi Pp 372-400
6. Dasgupta, M. 1987 'Selective discrimination against female children in Punjab, India,'Jou. Population studies Vol. 13 No 3 Pp 517-530
7. Desai, A.R. 1975 State and Society in India Essays in Dissent, Popular Prakashan Bombay
8. Deghe, A. 1985 "Women's employment in urban -informal sector some critical issues", Jou Social Change Vol 15 No 2 Pp 3-6
9. Deshpande, Shashi 1992, Roots and Shadows Paperback: Sangam Books Ltd; New Delhi
10. Heyer, Judith 2016 'Loosing ties of patriarchy in Agrarian Transition in Tamil Nadu' in edited Mohanty, B. B. "Critical Perspectives on Agrarian Transition, India in the global debate" A Routledge India original, South Asia edition Pp.199-222
11. Hobsbawm, E.(ed) Introduction to Pre-capitalist Economic Formations; Karl Marx International Publishers New York.
12. Kirpal.V 1980 A Study of the 1980s. Allied publisher Pvt Ltd, New Delhi
13. Marx, K. and Engels, F. 1979 pre-capitalist socioeconomic formation, Moscow, Progress publishers Nag, M. 1991 'Sex difference in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan and its effect in fertility' Jou. Demography India Vol 20 No 2 Pp 163-185
14. Pathy, J. 1982 'Agrarian Structure in Tribal Gujarat for its Implications for Tribal Policies, report submitted to ICSSR New Delhi
15. R.Semwal, M.M. and Jena, K. Inclusive Development and Institutional Dynamics, Abhijeet publications New Delhi
16. Salami S.O. 2008 'Gender, identity status and career maturity of adolescents in south west Nigeria' Jou. social sciences Vol 16 No. 1 Pp 35-49
17. Singh, M 1985 change and Punjabi women: A sociological analysis, Jou Social Change Vol 15 No 2 pp 29-36
18. Verma, J 1985 Life patterns and thinking of three generations of middle class Bihar women., Jou Social Change Vol 15 No 2 pp 23-28