

Women Empowerment: Some Issues



Women Study

KEYWORDS: Wome, Empowerment, Sender, Economic, Development

Dr.V.S.Madana

Guest Faculty, Dept. of Women Studies and Research, Gulbarga University, Gulbarga
585106-Karnataka.

ABSTRACT

Women are empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms - a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage.

Introduction:

Now the women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions. First, gender inequality in India can be traced back to the historic days of Mahabharata when Draupadi was put on the dice by her husband as a commodity.

The status of women is changing from time to time. The history of women in India has been exciting. Over the past few millennia, the status of women in India has been subject to many changes. Women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life in ancient days of India. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana point out that, women were educated in the early Vedic period. The Rigvedic verses tell that, the women married at a mature age and were free to select their life partner. Rig Veda and Upanishads, the holy books mention that, There were many women sages and seers, like Gari and Maitreyi. Stri. Dharma Paddhati, the text of Tryambakayajvan reflects the role of women and tells that, „women were enjoined to be of service to their husbands“. In some kingdoms of ancient India, tradition like Nagar Vadhu i.e bride of the city was practiced. Amrapali was the famous Nagar Vadhu. Women were competing to win the popular title of the „Nagar Vadhu“. During the early Vedic Period women enjoyed equal position and rights. Later around 500 B.C the position of women started to decline with the Manusmiti and with the Mughal invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity cut the freedom and rights of women. Even though penitentiary movements like Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order by and large, the women in India faced captivity and restrictions. Around sixth century, the practice of child marriages started.

Medieval Period

During the medieval period, the position of Indian woman in the society further deteriorated. Among some communities in India, practice of Sati, Child Marriages and a ban on remarriages of widows became part of social life. The Muslim conquest brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. The Jauhar was practiced among the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The practices of temple women (Devadasi) was in practice and were sexually exploited in some parts of India. Among Hindu Kshatriya rulers polygamy was widely practiced. Women were restricted to Zenana areas in many Muslim families.

During and after British rule the condition of women is not very good. The women are not viewed with equal status. In India, woman herself doesn't feel equal and many times she ill treats herself.

After independence

After independence India is free to take new and innovative

steps for women empowerment. The Indian Constitution guarantees about, women equality, no discrimination, equality of opportunity, equal pay for equal work for all Indian women and it allows the State to make special provisions in favour of women and children, renounces practices insulting to the dignity of women and for provisions for securing just and humanitarian conditions of work and for maternity relief. The cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into prostitution, domestic work or child labour to prevent this, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956. In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act and the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed in 1985.

In India all the medical tests that can be used to decide the sex of the child have been banned. Female infanticide is still prevails in some areas. In India the abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the major reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides. During late 1970s the feminist activism got momentum and the protest due to the issue of rape of young girl Mathura in police station by a policeman compelled the government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists amalgamated the issues of female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy. The Government of India passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce) Act, on the base of Supreme Court Judgment in 1986. Women-oriented NGOs were formed with the help of grants from foreign donors in 1990s. Self Help Groups, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), etc. played a key role in protecting women's rights by which many women have emerged as leaders of local movements in India. In 1997, the Supreme Court of India in important judgment took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace and the Court laid down guidelines for the prevention and redressal of grievances. Subsequently the National Commission for Women elaborated these guidelines into a Code of Conduct for employers.

Empowerment of women in India

The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD- 1985) and the National Commission for Women(NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that for reserv-

tion of seats(33%), whereas the report HRD as March2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Finland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India "The New Panchayati Raj " is the part of the effort to empower women at least at the village level.

The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. These are CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. The year of 2001 was observed as the year of women's empowerment. During the year, a landmark document has been adopted, ' the National Policy for the empowerment of women.' For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IME) etc. The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there are total 20, 56, 882 laces Gaon panchayat members, out of this women members is 8, 38, 244 (40.48%), while total Anchalik panchayat members is 1, 09, 324, out of this women members is 47, 455, (40.41%) and total Zila porisod members is 11, 708, out of this women members is 4, 923 (42.05%). At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc. The most notable amongst these are Mrs.protiva Devi Singh Patil, Shila Dixit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Binda karat, Nazma Hep-tulla, Indira Nuye (pepsi-co), BJP leader Susma Soraj, railway minister Momta Benarji, 'Narmada Basao' leader Medhapatkar, Indian Iron Woman, EX-prime minister Idira Gandhi etc. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers.

Reasons for the empowerment of women

Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need eco-

nomie power to stand on their own legs on per with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work.

They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problems is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Suggestions for women empowerment

- Create village self-help groups in which women independently establish financial institutions that manage profit-making programs.
- Help a Women's Empowerment Project that provides training for members, holds quarterly meetings, and provides vocational support.
- Educate the public about women's issues to ensure that local women receive equal opportunities and compensation, while promoting gender sensitivity.
- Assess the success of past women's leadership programs and make suggestions for improvements.
- Assist projects that focus on mobilizing local women to protect natural resources by controlling farmland development, composting, and preserving water.
- Establish workshops that introduce microenterprises to those in tribal communities; help provide skills training to increase levels of employment and reduce migration; and empower women to create their own income-generating activities.

REFERENCE

1. Bright, Pritom Singh (edt)---Competition Refresher, August, 2010, New Delhi. | 2. Hasnain, Nadeem---Indian Society and Culture, Jawahar Publishers and Distributors, 2004,New Delhi. | 3. Kar, P. K---Indian Society, Kalyani Publishers, 2000, Cuttack. | 4. Kidwai, A. R---(edt)Higher Education, issues and challenges, Viva Books, 2010, New Delhi). | 5. Rao Shankar, C. N.---Indian Society, S.Chand & Company Ltd, 2005, New Delhi. |