

THE NEED TO EMPOWER WOMEN OF INDIA

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Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity, have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace, to make their own choices and decisions, have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities, have equal social status in the society, have equal rights for social and economic justice, determine financial and economic choices, get equal opportunity for education, get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias and get safe and comfortable working environment. Women have the rights to get their voices heard.

The discriminated and exploited of women is seen all over the world. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men. Women play a very strategic role in the development of society in particular and development of economy in general. Woman is the leader planner of the family, the first trainer; supplier of labor power and by playing focal role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. Women contribute directly or indirectly for economic development. The nature though has given the genetic power of reproduction especially to the women, the socio-economic status of women is so poor and the incidence of poverty is more on woman only. To empower women is the only solution for all questions. Women's potentially hidden power is to be utilized for which her status in the society needs to be improved and she should be strengthened economically. The poverty being the main cause for her low bargaining power hence poverty

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should be removed. Empowering women and removal of poverty go hand in hand. An educated woman empowers her potential power which can be utilized for the economic development. Mahatma Gandhi says, “You educate a man, you educate an individual. You educate a woman, you educate an entire family”.

Human history is a crucial juncture living under the shades of ethnic and nuclear warfare and radically discriminatory economic regime. The crux of present world needs specific attention on ecology, development and gender. Women constituting half of the population have been subjected to the dictatorship of a patriarchal order for centuries, which is still being continued. Worldwide the status of women has been low and they usually have fewer rights than men. The dominant role of a wife and a mother are the two traditional roles in women’s lives. Hence, widespread discrimination the women face all over the world still is demanding equality and justice¹. Today's India offers a lot of opportunities to women, with women having a voice in everyday life, the business world as well as in political life. They are considered as the perfect home maker in the world. With their incomparable quality of calmness of their mind, they can easily handle even toughest situation. Indian women are completely devoted to their families. Nevertheless India is still a male dominated society. However, India is moving away from the male dominated culture, discrimination is still highly visible in rural as well as in urban areas throughout all strata of society. While women are guaranteed equality only under the constitution, legal protection has a limited effect, where patriarchal traditions prevail.

Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment means developing women through political participation, economically productive and independent and making effective decisions that affect their lives². Empowerment of women means developing women into an awaked individual. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the International Women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, defining it as redistribution of social power and control of resources but in favour of women³. It is believed that empowerment aids to help women achieve equality with men or

¹ Reddy, Narayana, Kumar, V Vijaya and B S Nalini, “Women in Development Challenges and Achievements”, Serial Publication, New Delhi, 2005

² U Koko, “Empowering People For Health and Family Planning”, IASSI Quarterly, Volume 11, 2005

³ Suman Panucha and Ankita Khatik, “Empowerment of Rural Women”, Social Action, Volume 55, 2005

reducing maximum gender discrimination to an extent. The participation of women in political process of development is of crucial importance from the consideration of both equality and development. Political liberation and social empowerment shall also act actively in achieving the empowerment of women widely. Empowerment improves decision making and action ensuring equal participation and bringing about change in the society. Thus the women will become empowered through collective reflection and decision making⁴.

The United Nation Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the factors mentioned below in its definition of Women Empowerment:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life⁵.

Batliwala (1974) defines empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power relation and of gaining greater control over the source of power". Women's empowerment is viewed as the process and the result of process of:

- Challenging the ideology of male domination and women's subordinations.
- Enabling women to gain equal access to and control over the resources (material, human and intellectual)⁶.

Empowered Women Characteristics

According to Hall C M (1992)⁷ the empowered women have the following Characteristics:

- Empowered women define their attitudes, values and behavior in relation to their own real interests. They have autonomy in claiming freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional or modern or industrial societies.

⁴ J P Singh, "Indian Democracy and Empowerment of Women", Indian Journal of Public Administration, Volume 44 (4), October-December, 2000

⁵ V S Ganeswamurthy, "Empowerment of Women in India- Social Economics and Political", New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2008

⁶ N K Thakur and R N Thakur, "Impact of Economic Reform Policies on Dalit and Weaker Sections", Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi 2008

⁷ Hall C.M Women Empowerment, London, Hemisphere Publications Corporation.1992

- Empowered women maintain equal-mindedness, rather than play roles that merely confront and challenge male dominance. Empowered women do not aim at being superior to men. They may act as equal and co-operate in order to achieve the common goal.
- Empowered women use their talents to lead a better life. They have not only survived the harshness of their own subjugation, but they have also transcended their subjugation, this moving themselves through survival of their strength in the presence of the pressures of family, religion and work and they contribute to the empowerment of all women.
- Empowered women may continue to fulfill their family responsibilities and participate in religious activities. They not only shoulder their traditional responsibilities, but they force their own ways of doing things.
- Empowered women realize their values and formulate their beliefs themselves. They do not derive their sense of being from male authorities and they do not live vicariously through men. Empowered women strengthen themselves through other women's support and sustain their own distinctive ideals.
- Empowered women can be found in all societies. However, the required conditions of empowered women are both individual and social, and these are making the women to be empowered in modern societies, because the collective actions of women are more visible and more palpable in these settings.

The strategy for empowerment of women must be three fold: Education promotes positive self-image and self-confidence among women and develops their ability to think critically; Skill development and employment for economic independence; and Increasing awareness among women about health, nutrition, economic, political and environment processes to ensure equal participation in the process of bringing social change. The empowerment of women is linked with their educational and economic status in society. Women are in a state of economic, social, political and academic disempowerment. The solution lies in reversing this trend and empowering them socially, economically and politically. This status can be achieved through capacity – building facilities like access to education, knowledge, skill development and information.

Components

Women empowerment is considered an effort to rectify the imbalance of gender discrimination and attain equality. Women's empowerment helps raise economic productivity and reduces infant mortality. It also contributes towards improved health and nutrition and increases chances of education, empowerment and promising equality for next generation. Making women empowered is linked with their increasing participation in decision making. Women empowerment can be viewed as the component of several inter-related and mutually strengthening components.

- There is a need of creating awareness building about woman's situations, discrimination, rights and opportunities leading steps forward towards gender equality. Providing a sense of group identity collective awareness powers the working of a group as a group.
- Development of skills and building capacity, mainly on the ability to plan, decision making, organizing, managing and executing activities in order to deal with people and the institutions around them.
- Enhance decision making and stronger control, participation, authority at home, community and society indicating the realization of one's capability and confidence to take charge of one's life.
- Initiate steps to bring about greater equality between men and women, ultimately realizing the recognition of women's equality with men as an independent individual in the society.

Dimensions and Parameters of Empowerment

Enable the poor in order to uplift their lives the process of empowerment covers different dimensions such as economical, social, political, educational, physical and psychological. The each one embraces equal importance in the process of empowerment for the poor and deprived sections. The fulfilling empowerment covers following dimensions in its preview:

Economic Empowerment

Women's role are often seen as reproductive and domestic in support of men who is considered to be a breadwinner of the family, this practice has conditioned women to accept a subordinate

role. Doubtlessly, education is one of the important indicators towards women empowerment but getting more girls into the schools is clearly not the priority. The women nevertheless are heavily engaged in subsistence agricultural and informal sector of economy the fact being largely absent from workplace and from official labor statistic. In order to consolidate the position of women that are only reproducers and not producers there are constant efforts being laid.

There is a need to bring change in ideas. The economic right of women is definitely an important indicator for enhancement of women's status in India. Women's labor needs to be recognized, education more employment avenues, political awareness etc., would all lead to the women economic emancipation. Economic dimension covers equal benefit of economic growth, credit, social connection, local participation and interaction of socially marginalized group for betterment of their lives. Hence, in this regard, developing countries give priority for economic growth to improve the living standard of their citizens.

Social Empowerment

Being the major limitation to the advancement of women the institutionalized set of social prescriptions limits their participation in socio-economic activities and their decision making inputs. The emergence of female entrepreneur's process depends upon closely interlinked economic, social, religious and psychological variable⁸. Efforts of increasing the potential for women social participation is extended down to the level of the household. Though the realities of restricted social and economic participation at the household level may be recognized, it is clear that changing relationship at this level may be the most challenging task. The empowering of women requires fundamental changes at many levels of society; the most complex and indefinable transformation may be within the household and the family. This dimension emphasizes institutional mechanism to promote cordial relationship among the members and implement recognition capability of members in society. It brings members close to each other from economic, cultural, religious and psychological views which help them to keep the tie strong.

⁸ A F Odejide, "Appropriate Strategies for improving Women's Participation in the Rural Industrialization Process", a paper presented at the national workshop on women in development sponsored by the National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA)

Political Empowerment

Decentralization of power, sharing ideas, transformation of information and respect of each other is included in political dimension of empowerment with the inclusion of democratic values in order to maintain cordial relationship in the process of development. It creates awareness about day-to day activities of politics, which plays a vital role surrounding them. Legal rights provided under the constitution encourages women participation in contesting election, casting of their votes and helps them to solve their domestic problems through democratic. The socio-economic development of women along with the concept of equity, equality and justice is promoted through political dimension in all the spheres of life.

The political empowerment is considered to be the only accelerator which will bring about the perceptible change in the lot of women. Though in this regard legal protection is provided in the Constitution of India in order to enjoy the freedom, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, socio-economic and political justice, equality of status and opportunity, promote fraternity, assurance of dignity of individual and unity of the nation.

Educational Empowerment

Education empowers people by improving literacy, gender sensitivity, equal opportunities and awareness, entrepreneurship, leadership, teamwork approach and such. Education helps to access one towards the advanced technology and respond to the globalization taking place around the world. In other words educational empowerment is considered as important means to improve the local activities of the marginalized people or groups.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4 August 2009, which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. Education not only helps to increases knowledge but also enables thinking of generating income along with awareness about health and its related issues. Education is also considered as one of the significant components in improving the quality of life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights regards education as one of the basic right of every human being.

Physical Empowerment

Empowering women physically promotes good health and capability for higher productivity. Physical empowerment makes other dimension stronger. The appropriate technology being one of the dimensions of physical empowerment helps in valuing time and energy in the process of production. Programme strategies and policy recommendations often assume that helping women to empower themselves, particularly through female education, vocational training and employment will provide women with resources that will in turn decrease their risk of adverse reproductive health outcomes. There are various projects under various states looking at issues of gender, sexuality, reproductive health, violence and sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV prevention among vulnerable women and men.

Physical empowerment explores certain aspects of empowerment, such as women's employment, vocational training and social group participation affecting the risk of violence differentially prior to or after the time of marriage. The *Samata Health Project* is an ongoing women's health research study looking at issues of gender, sexuality, reproductive health, violence and sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV prevention among vulnerable women and men in Bangalore. Physical hardship concerted effort to improve upon women's health status other advancement will have the limited impact on them. Physical empowerment has contributory effects dependently on other dimensions too.

Psychological Empowerment

In the developing countries women's position is far more less in the society and also their contribution in the economy. The majority of rural women have no occupation despite the fact, that they engage themselves in two or three productive activities in order to generate more income to meet the daily needs of their families. The women with low position in many societies' portraits themselves have negative view of their potential and importance.

As Udegbe recognizes that empowerment must also be seen as a 'psychological process of transformation' as there is a need to 'reverse the feeling of learned helplessness' among women which leads them to increase their knowledge, capacity, self-confidence, high self-esteem, self-

reliance and ultimate's them with well being of empowered⁹. Education is the only source of power to change the subordinate view which women have upon themselves and also creates moral support for capabilities of the deprived sections. Psychological empowerment makes individual fearless and removes obstacles for participation of individuals or groups in society.

Parameters of Women Empowerment

- The parameters of women empowerment are:
- Socialize self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Riddance of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
- Maintaining and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organizations.
- Coercion of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.
- Creating a positive image of women in the society and recognizing their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
- Developing ability among women to think critically.
- Encouraging decision-making and collective action.
- Enabling women to make informed choices.
- Ensuring women's participation in all spheres of life.
- Awaking them with information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.
- Elimination of discrimination against women's participation in the areas of: Access to food, Equal wages, Property rights, Family resources, Freedom of movement and travel, Access to credit, Control over savings, earnings and resources, Guardianship and custody of children and their maintenance
- Gender sensitization training in schools, colleges and other professional institutions for bringing about institutional changes¹⁰.

Women need to swim against the stream that requires mere strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment. The women can be empowered through providing proper education, health and nutrition facilities.

⁹ L Erinsho, B Osotimehin and J E Olowoye, "Women Empowerment and the Reproductive Health", Social Sciences and Reproductive Health Research Network, Ibadan 1996

¹⁰ Sandhya Rani Das, "Empowerment of Women: A Historical Approach", Women Education and Development, Discovering Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006

Conclusion

Women population constitutes half of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces. The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also help develop the society. Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption. Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. Sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women help the family to come out of poverty trap. Women Empowerment leads to decrease domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than the educated women.

Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities. Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large. Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Unlike earlier days when they stayed at home only and do only kitchen stuffs, nowadays, they roam outside and also earn money like the male members of the society.

Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy. Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every sphere including medical science, social service, engineering, etc. Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.