



Conceptual understanding of women empowerment in India

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyze the status of the Women empowerment in India using the various indicators like women empowerment, participation in India. Empowerment in its emancipatory meaning is a serious word one which brings up the question of personal agency, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice. Empowerment includes control over resources like physical, human, intellectual, financial and over ideology like beliefs, values and attitudes. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic and political strength of the women's to make sure of the equal right to woman, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. Women empowerment literally means "to invest with power. In the context of women's empowerment the term has come to denote a woman's increased control over their own lives, bodies and environment". According to United Nations each country has "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals including equal access to primary education between girls and boys, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Keywords: empowerment, political participation, gender equality, representation, women empowerment

Introduction

The concept of the Women empowerment is very essential for the development of the society. It has undergone sea changes from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. It has been understood as the process by which powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of the women life. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the situations of ones lives. Women empowerment is a process in which women need to her self-development and share of control over resources- material, human and knowledge, information regarding opportunities, ideas of empowerment, and to financial resources. It also implies an access to money and control over decision-making at society, community and nation and to gain power. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely; exercises chose and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society.

Women Empowerment

The concept of the Women empowerment is a universal concept. It is a multi-dimensional approach and involves a basic retaliation and awareness of women power, capabilities, women rights, and opportunities of all round development in all spheres of life women empowerment. Therefore women empowerment is a process of women independence of economic, political participation, and social development.it is creating the conditions for women to be able to make choices which implies that women may have different preferences then men, but also different abilities to make choice because of gender inequalities in bargaining power and access to

resources. It also refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women.

According to the UN Secretary –General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon^[1],

"Empowerment is not new to the United Nations. Our long standing efforts to protect human rights, promote job creation and obtain improved access to water, sanitation, energy, education and health care all have empowerment at their core areas. The goal of ensuring that people have the opportunities they need to live better lives in dignity and security. But we are also exploring new frontiers of empowerment. He said with the establishment of United Nations and Women, the effort to empower the world's women and achieve gender equality received an important boost.

Empowerment has different interpretations. According to World Bank, defining

"its approach to empowerment of economic growth and poverty reduction, describes empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with influence, control and hold accountable institution that affect their lives"^[2].

This meaning of the empowerment to highlights the dimensions of choice, action and ability to influence

institutions. According to

“Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland, empowerment is to strengthening of individual performance based an agency and their ability to change the institutional rules that shape human behavior and social interactions” [3].

Women’s empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include the educational status, caste and class status and the gender inequality. The policies of the Women empowerment exist at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities gender based violence and political participation. It 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. However, there are significant gap between policy advancements and practice at the community level.

The empowerment of the women begins “when women becomes aware of the socially psychologically, and culturally injustice that is being done to her and also how gender inequality and inequity and gender and social-cultural, economic and political forces are affecting her adversely in every sphere of her life. It starts when she becomes fully aware of her positive self-image, self-esteem, positive rights and duties, of her capabilities and potentialities” [4].

Women’s position in India

The status of Women refers to the position of Women in society in relation to men. Compared with men, women have very limited opportunities in most spheres of economic and social activities. However, there is a close association between various aspects of women’s status or position in society and demographic patterns of fertility, mortality and migration. This association is shown to be more pronounced with regard to fertility and the social process associated with it [5].

During the post-Vedic period, women have started losing the status in society, which she attained in the Vedic age. She lost her independence; she became a subject of protection. Manu, the progenitor of Hindu race, stated that “women should be keep day and night in subordination by males of the family-women has to protect by her father in childhood, by her husband in young age and by the sons in old age. She lost her identity at her marriage. In addition Manu codes are legal authority of the tome with respect to Hindu family. He did not treat women at par with man so far as rituals of Vedas are concerned. The Women was not eligible for the study of Vedas nor for use of mantras in performing sacraments expect marriage” [6].

The medieval period proved to be highly disappointing for the Indian Women, for their status further deteriorated during this period. With the coming of Muslim rule, “medieval India witnessed enhanced dependency of Women on men. The Islamic custom of Purdah forced the public world to be separated from the private world, with women confined to the latter” [7]. Muslim invasion of India changed the direction of Indian Society. The influx of foreign invaders and the Brahmanical iron laws were main causes for such degradation. However, during the 14th and 15th centuries, the social

situation had undergone some change Ramanujacharya organized the first Bhakti movement during this period which introduced new trends in the social and the religious life of women in India. The Bhakti movements tried to restore Women’s status and questioned some of the forms of oppression.

In the latter half of the 18th century, when the British came to India, Women’s status had dropped to the lowest level. It was the worst period in the history of the country because of the Child marriage and Sati system etc. During the British period there were two major movements which affected the position of Women. These were the Social reform Movement of the nineteenth Century and the Nationalist Movement of the twentieth century.

The status of Indian Women has radically changed the after the Indian Independence. After the Indian independence, women attained the bonafied citizenship of the new nation. And also the status of Women can be observed in the light of major changes that have taken place in area such as legislation, education, economic, and employment sector and awareness of their rights on the part of Women. Although the Indian Constitution farmers agreed on the basic principles of equality yet they expressed views when it was applied to the traditional strongholds of male privileges, the right to property and over all dominance in the family.

The Constitution of India was declared equality as one of the Fundamental rights. It also guaranteed following provisions in Men and Women. According to the Article 14th of the Indian Constitution, state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Article 15 the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Much latter in context of the equality, Indira Gandhi remarked that “I don’t think that any society can progress if half its members do not have equal opportunity and their talent and capabilities are ignored” [8]. Apart from fundamental right, the state government has been empowered to enact special laws for protecting Women.

Dimensions of women empowerment

Empowerment is multi-dimensional as it covers financial independence, social awareness and political consciousness of an individual. These elements can be categorized as economic empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment.

Economic empowerment

India is the world’s largest democracy and fastest growing economy in global world. The country has made good advancements on poverty reduction, education, but progress still needs to be made in reducing inequality and hunger, improving maternal mortality rates and enabling greater access to water and sanitation for the large majority of its people.

Women empowerment and economic development are closely related. The meaning of the development can bring down inequalities in Indian society; however, “gender inequalities can only by bring down by ensuring women’s participation. Women’ economic participation is fundamental to strengthen their rights and enable them to have control over their lives

and establish a place for themselves in society. Women's economic participation is fundamental to strengthen their rights and enable them to have control over their lives and establish a place for themselves in society. An inclusive development, therefore, can happen if the participation of women is ensured. In the context of discrimination and inequalities against women, Amartya Sen coined the term, missing women, which aptly sums up the society we live in. These terms focus on the persistence of gender inequalities in societies" [9].

According to the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2009 "ranked India 114th out of 134 countries for inequality between men and women in the country, politics, health and education. On equal economic opportunities and women's participation in the labour force, India ranked 127th and 122nd respectively. The number of women in the workforce varies greatly from state to state Delhi 21 percent, Punjab 23 percent, Manipur 65 percent, Chhattisgarh 71 percent, Arunachal Pradesh 76 percent are women are working in labour force. The diversity of women's economic opportunities between states is due to the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity of each state" [10].

Economic empowerment encompasses the economic dimension, which has been visible in the policy paradigm in recent times. The Women's conference in Beijing platform suggested that women's need economic independence. "It can be said that without economic independence the women cannot be empowered. Only social and political empowerment does not ensure economic empowerment unless the individual has access to the economic goals resources and opportunities. To realize women's rights and achieve border development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education, and welfare, it is important to empower women" [11].

Women economic opportunities in rural India remain restricted by the social, cultural and religious barriers. The most of women's in rural India "suffered from Hindu and Shariat civil codes continue to marginalize women in the household and the larger community. In rural India, Women, particularly lower caste and class, have lowest literacy rates, and therefore do not have capacity to negotiate pay or contracts and must often engage in the unorganized sector, self-employment or in small scale industry" [12].

Education empowerment

Education is considered as a basic requirement and a fundamental right or the citizens of any nation. "It is a powerful tool for reducing inequality as it can give people the ability to become independent. Education is regarded as an important milestone of women empowerment because it enables to face the challenges; to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education of women is the most powerful tool of changes their position in the society" [13]. Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political rights are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide.

An education of women can bring change in the attribute of family members and society. It also helps in removing mal-traditions like Sati-Pratha, Early marriage, Dowry etc. "Education plays an important role in removing economic

poverty by opening various job avenues for her so that she can work hand in hand with man and give support to the family. Education promotes team work rather than making a woman individualistic. Education makes her an opportunity to choose a career which is best suited for her. Education of women enhances the women empowerment in the following ways" [14].

- Every woman has got her own aspiration which may be high or low, but education helps to maintain a balanced aspiration knowing her interest, ability and potential which further helps her to choose a correct field of her work;
- Education helps in balanced personality development by giving due weight to various aspects of personality;
- Education of women also plays an important role in teaching her expression of feeling or through effective communication which can solve disputes and adjustment problems of any level;
- An educated woman is a guiding light for the children, family members, society and nation, she knows how to have a happy family and balanced and healthy relations with others;
- Education gives power to a woman to become strong physically by giving her knowledge about sports, exercise, health-related aspects and good physical health; this will definitely benefit her mental health;
- Education helps to improve the sex ratio and in controlling population;
- Education encourages women especially the rural women to take advantage of the various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Operation Balak - Board and Total Literacy programmes etc.

Women education more "helpful for family to earn money that means she is able to develop the economy status of family and also for nation. Women can help, through their work; get rid of problem like India's high maternal mortality rate, high rates of gender violence and other crime against women child sex abuse female feticide, implement family planning and other schemes [15]". Education "is to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations. Swami Vivekananda said "there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved". It is education which can do so by empowering women" [16].

Women and Political participation

The status of the Women in India has seen the difference in since the ancient period to medieval period. In the post-independent India, the status of women regained its strength and has been on the rise ever since. In post independent women have been participating in economic activities, voting for choose better government and also in active politics. Political Women Empowerment in India can be measured three different dimensions; the first one is their participation as a Voter, second, their participation as an elected representative and third dimensions is their participation in the actual decision making process.

Women political participation has been considered a major

measure of Women's empowerment. Globally, through histories of the world we have records of very few regents, sovereigns, and active agents in nobility who were women. "Liberalism thinker John Stuart Mill had advocated women's participation in governance by the struggle for women suffrage in the self-avowed liberal west very well illustrates the entrenched nature of patriarchal resistance to Women's empowerment" [17].

The participation of women in political sphere is integral to empowerment of women and to build a gender equality in society as well as to speed up the process of national development, Women's political empowerment is premised on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles.

- The equality between the men and Women;
- To development of potentials women's rights;
- Self-determination and self-representation of the Women's rights

Political empowerment is a process that enables women to increase their confidence and to prevent their isolation in politics. It is also develop their self-confidence and self-performance and to establish their public life whereby they participate in decision making in an expanding framework of awareness and influence the direction of development. Political equality includes not only equal rights to franchise but also give more importance to access the institutionalized centers of power.

As per the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment act in 1991 to provisional for 33 present reserved seats in Gram panchyath in our country came to being. In the starting of the women participation is very less but still the situation was changing more number women are participated in the elections. "The average of women representation in panchyath raj across the country is 36.54 percent. However, a few states have gone beyond the mandated 33 percent and provided more reservation for women. for instance Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uattakahand, Rajasthan have reserved 50 percent seats for women in panchyath and Sikkim has reserved 40 percent seats or women. The Constitution's 110th Amendment Bill 2009 provides reservation for women form 33 percent to 50 present in Panchyath Raj institutions. The bill seeks to amend the Article 243 D to enhance the quantum of reservations for women form on third to one-half of the total seats in the panchyaths" [18]. The Participation of women in Panchyath Raj institutions has been recognized as a step towards equality.

Women have, however, not found adequate representation in the Lok Sabha." The percentage of the elected women in Loka Sabha only 4.4 percent in 1952, in 2014 Loka Sabha election 11.41 percent women are elected. The Rajya Sabha does not fare much better, with 29 women members comprising 11.9% of the total membership in 2014. Both national and regional parties are following the policy of exclusion of women in allotting seats. The reasons for not giving tickets to women candidates at the national and state level are based on the perception that they lack the win ability factor" [19].

Social empowerment in women

The Social empowerment means a "more equitable social status for women in society because the primary responsibility of any human society is to ensure human dignity to all

members.it is often argued that facilitating women's access to money is not an effective means for achieving Women's empowerment unless it is linked to other kinds of activities like training on awareness of the impact of women's subordination, concept of self-esteem and on the meaning and benefits of empowering women" [20].

The social empowerment of women indicates base of gender equality, sex ratios, life expectancy rates and fertility rates which show the general status of women in terms of literacy, economic growth, availability of health care and birth control facilities, educational status of women, age at marriage, literacy rates and participation of women outside the home. When women "gain voice in decision making which is to be stared within the family, they would be in a position to take decision for improving the socio-economic status. However, women's increased participation at the decision making level can only be said to lead to their increased development and empowerment if such participation enables them to achieve greater control over factors of production, access to resources and the distribution of benefits" [21].

Conclusion

The Women empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century in not only national level but also at the global world. The development of women empowerment was not sufficient to achieve the goal of the Women rights and government initiatives alone would not sufficient to empowering the Women. In rural India, women were facing the illiteracy, lack of awareness, poverty, caste and class problems. It was not to participate in the decision making and development of her life. Government policies are failure to balance of the gender equality. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the county with a sense of equality. Empowerment is not going to be change the culture of disregards for women which are so deep-rooted in Indian society. Women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing poverty, promoting education and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

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