

Women Empowerment: An Emerging Concept

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ABSTRACT

For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They were not allowed to own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, and they had no voting right and no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women, there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women. For empowering them, we need to know about performance of women in society as well as in nation. Without their participation the national activities, the socio-economic or political progress of a country will be stagnated. And when we talking about women empowerment it is the most vital system to strengthen the future of women In India. In this paper we are concluding the status of Indian women towards empowerment and self-confidence.

Levels of Empowerment

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable women or group of women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. We have to relate empowerment at three levels:

1] empowerment on the individual, 2] group, and 3] societal/community- level. The **individual** level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over Lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and Work towards this goal. **Group** level deals with the collective action and sense of agency that Woman experience together, in a group.

And the **societal** level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do. The different levels are seen an interconnected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal level. Women who are empowered on an individual level will

most likely go on and affect the other levels. Empowerment on group level e.g. women organizing around particular need to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self-esteem and sense of agency.

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Status of Women Empowerment in India

The status of Women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few years. In Vedic period Women enjoyed equal status with men. Rigved & upnishads mention several names of women sages and seers notably Gargi & Maitrey. Some reformatory movements by Guru Nanak, Jainism, Rajaram mohanRai, shwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Pandita Rama Bai and others did give some relief. It is not that Britishers didn't do anything for improving the condition of women. Some laws were enacted such an "Abolition of practice of Sati", Widow Remarriage Act 1856 etc. The real change was shown after independence. Constitution of India guarantees equality to women. The real impetus for this movement was gained when under the Priministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, a scheme known as Indira Mahila Yojana was launched, UNDP also incorporated issues of women upliftment as Primary objective. Various Schemes were later on launched for the empowerment of women such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Self-help groups at Panchayat level and many more. The establishment of National Women's Commission and State Women's Commissions were important milestones in the direction of women empowerment in India. The National Policy for the Empowerment of women (2001) was major step taken by the Government of the time for accelerating the pace of women empowerment. The policy was aimed at ensuring women empowerment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women. The policy assured equal access to women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economic life of the nation. The National Policy also aims at strengthening legal system for eliminating discrimination against Women. It also visualizes strengthening partnership with Civil Society, particularly Women's organizations. States have also taken various measures for empowerment of women. As a result today's Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc., like Indira Gandhi who served as P.M. of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister, Pratibha Patil our first Women president of India, Aishwarya Rai bachhan, Saniya mirza and so on famous personalities in different area. But women have still to face several problems in our society; women are becoming unprotected day by day both at their homes and outsides (like recent Delhi rape case, 2012). The National Crime record Bureau states in its report that every hour in India 18 women are raped. There has been recorded 700 percent phenomenal increase in case of rape from 1971 dates, whereas in other areas of crime against

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women this increase is 300 percent. Evidently, this heinous crime against women reflects the faltering moral and mental state of men in society. Women in India lead their lives generally under the shadow of inequality and discrimination. So far as half of the population is prey to inequality, exploitation, backward and injustice and is deprived of human rights, democracy cannot be established in India in real terms.

Social Empowerment of Women

Under the social empowerment of women steps needs to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities. A programme for checking the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV / AIDS and infections / communicable diseases like T.B. need to be launched. Women face high risk of malnutrition hence focused attention would have to be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life cycle. The problem in the country is serious about the women belonging to disadvantaged groups. They are the most exploited lot. Schemes need to be introduced for helping women who are victims of marital violence, who are deserted and those engaged in sex professions. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. Government has to be vigilant for ensuring that there is no discrimination against the girl child and her rights are protected. The social stigma like child marriage. Female feticide, child abuse and child prostitution must be eradicate immediately.

Education and Women Empowerment

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A team of watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates.

Role of NGO's in Women Empowerment

Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations / NGO's have gained increased attention in the field from grass – root level to

national & international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGO's is open, transparent and personal. So, they are more effective in this direction. They organize seminars, conferences and workshops or the awakening of the masses. Their mass appeal – style contributes to a better understanding of women's rights and of the means to ensure the enjoyment of those rights and the elimination of discrimination. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self – employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

Conclusion

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure gender equality but government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must change their thinking and 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 the Social, Political and Economic life of the country with a sense of equality and security. Then only the words come true that “Wherever Women is respected, God resides there”.

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