

Empowerment of Women

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Introduction:-

Twentieth century has brought a great change in the lives of women all over the world influencing their attitudes, values aspirations, ways of feeling, standards of behaviour and actions for effective participation in all walks of life.

Empowering of women presupposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the perception and expectation from women in our society. To help women to attain economic independence is the first priority for such a change when a woman attains economic independence she naturally becomes the mistress of own body and author of her own decisions. Even she can take free choice of her sex life and no one can force her to use her for their pleasure one benefit. A scientific perception of women's needs is essential for the process which leads to the empowering. The status of women is a significant reflection of the social justice in a society. Women have contributed to the progress of humanity on every age. They have several as the corner stone of stability. They have been instruments of change. They have contributed significantly towards nation making.

The declared objective of the UN Decade for women was- "Integration of women in development as equal partners with men." The integration model of development implied that women are excluded from the procedures of development and should be included to participate on equal terms with men. The majority of women in developing countries carry the enormous burden of poverty and discrimination. All kinds of discrimination originated from physical related superiority of men over women and this feature is found to be manifested in a very ugly manner even in highly civilized societies today. The accumulated vested interests growing out of the initial wrongs have now crossed the limits of tolerance and this called for actions on the part of authorities throughout the world. But at the root of the problem lies in the human psychology, economic and other steps, will be able to remove temporarily only some amount of discrimination. Though the rights to equality and equal pay equal jobs have been guaranteed by legislation in many countries, the traditional attitude of sex base still continues and women are not only ill-paid but also ill-treated.

The conditions of women's underdevelopment need to be changed for awaiting the existing opportunities. Invisible societal values, patriarchal assumptions and the idea of women's role need to undergo a change to allow access and participation which can lead to women's empowerment, otherwise women will remain only income augmenters by marketing household skills, being educated in skills with a poor market. There is growing consensus that women's concerns should be an integral part of nation's development efforts. It is claimed that the 'Indian perspective' on women's equality and development leans very heavily on planning measures to expand and deepen women's role and effective share in all aspects of development as the essential step towards realization of their equality in society. Women's Development is directly related with national development. The effective management and development of women's resources i.e. their abilities, interests, skills and other potentialities are the paramount in human resource.

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What is empowerment?

The most conspicuous feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power, which to sidestep philosophical debate, may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human, or financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and labour money and access to money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour-virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socioeconomic and political environment.

Empowerment is a process of building capacities and confidence for taking decisions about one's own life at an individual and collective level and gaining control over productive resources. The empowerment process is facilitated by creating awareness about one's rights and responsibilities and

socio-economic, educational and political opportunities.

Women empowerment signifies harnessing ‘Women Power’ by conscientising women of their tremendous potentials, encouraging them to work towards a better, more dignified and more satisfying life for them win confidence and competence.

In south Asia, women in general and poor women in particular, are relatively powerless, with little or no control over resources and little decision making power. Often, even the limited resources at their disposal—such as a little land, a near by forest and their own bodies, labour and skills are not within their control and the decision made by others affect their lives every day. This does not mean that women are or have always been, powerless; for centuries they have tried to exercise their power within the family. They also have taken control of the resources to which society has allowed them access, and even seized control of resources when they could the Chipko movement in northern India and the Green Belt movement in Kenya. They have always attempted, from their traditional position as workers, and wives, not only to influence their immediate environment, but also to expand their space. The process of women’s empowerment must challenge patriarchal relations and thus inevitably leads to changes in men’s traditional control over women, particularly over the women of their households. Men in communities where such change have already occurred men no longer have control over women’s bodies, sexuality, or mobility, they cannot abdicate responsibility for housework and child care, nor physically abuse or violate or violate women with impurity; they cannot (as is the case in south Asia at present) abandon or divorce their wives without providing maintenance, or commit bigamy or polygamy, or make unilateral decisions that affect the whole family. Clearly, then women’s empowerment does mean the loss of the privileged position that patriarchy allotted to men.

Process of Empowerment:-

In order to challenge their subordination, women must first recognize the ideology that legitimize male domination and understand how it perpetuate their oppression. This recognition requires reversal of the values and attitudes, indeed the entire worldview, that most women have internalized since earliest childhood – women have been led to participate in their own oppression through a complex web of religious sanctions, social and cultural taboos and superstitions, hierarchies among women in the family, behavioral training, seclusion, veiling, curtailment of physical mobility, discrimination in food and other family resource and control of their sexuality (including) concepts like the “good” and “bad” woman. Most poor women have never been allowed to think for themselves or to make their own choice except in unusual circumstances, when a male decision maker has been absent or has abdicated his role. Because questioning is not allowed, the majority of women grow up believing that this is the just and “natural” order. *Three major approaches to women’s empowerment* were identifiable: integrated development programs, economic development and consciousness raising and organizing among women. These are not mutually exclusive categories, but they help to distinguish among the differing interpretations of the causes of women’s powerlessness and, hence among the different interventions thought to lead to empowerment

The integrated development approach ascribes women’s powerlessness to their greater poverty and lower access to health care, education, and survival resources. Strategies are focuses on providing services and enhancing economic status. Some NGOs also emphasize awareness building. This approach improves women’s condition mainly by helping them meet their survival and livelihood need

The economic development approach places women economic vulnerability at the control of their powerlessness and posits that economic empowerment has a positive impact on other aspects of women’s existence. Its strategies are built around strengthening women’s position as workers and income earners by mobilizing, organizing or unionizing and providing access to support services. Though this approach undoubtedly improves women’s economic position and condition, it is not clear that this change necessarily empowers them in other dimensions of their lives.

The consciousness-raising and organizing approach is based on a more complex understanding of gender relations and women’s status. This method ascribes powerlessness to the ideology and practice of patriarchy and structures of society strategies focus more on organizing women to recognize and challenge both gender and class-based discrimination in all aspects of their lives, in both the public and the private spheres. Women are mobilized to struggle for greater access to resources, rather than passively provided with schemes and services. This approach is successful in enabling women to address their position and strategic needs, but may not be as effective in meeting immediate needs

Empowerment: Three Approaches : Three experimental approaches to empowering women have been undertaken in South Asia: integrated development, economic empowerment, and consciousness-raising. While these approaches differ from each other in concept, most organizations working on the ground take a mix of approaches. Common to all three is the importance placed on group formation to build solidarity among women.

The integrated development approach views women's development as key to the advancement of family and community. It therefore provides a package of interventions to alleviate poverty, meet basic survival needs, reduce gender discrimination, and help women gain self-esteem. This approach proceeds either by forming women's collectives that engage in development activities and tackle social problems such as dowry, child marriage, and male alcoholism (Proshika in Bangladesh; RDRS in Rajasthan, India), or by employing an "entry point" strategy, using a specific activity, such as a literacy class or health program, to mobilize women into groups (Gonoshtya Kendra in Bangladesh, United Mission to Nepal, Redd Barna in Nepal)

The economic empowerment approach attributes women's subordination to lack of economic power. It focuses improving women's control over material resources and strengthening women's economic security. Groups are formed using two methods; organizing women around savings and credit, income generation, or skill training activities (Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Program of Credit for Rural Women in Nepal); or by occupation or location (SEWA in India, Proshika). These groups may work in a range of areas, including savings and credit, training and skills development new technologies or marketing, as well as provide such ancillary supports child care, health services, literacy programs and legal education and aid.

The consciousness raising approach asserts that women's empowerment requires awareness of the complex factors causing women's subordination. This approach organizes women into collectives that tackle the sources of subordination (ASTHA, Deccan Development society, Mahila Samakhya, WOP in India; Nijera Kori in Bangladesh). Education is central and is defined as a process of learning that leads to a new consciousness, self-worth, societal and gender analysis, and access to skills and information. In this approach, the groups themselves determine their priorities. Women's knowledge of their own bodies and ability to control reproduction are also considered vital. The long-term goal is for the women's groups to be independent of the initiating NGO. This approach uses no particular service "entry point and attempts to be open-ended and non-directive. It gives considerable emphasis to fielding "change agents", who are trained to catalyze women's thinking without determining the directions in which a particular group may go.

Empowerment Strategy:-

No one magic formula or fail-safe design exists for empowerment. Nonetheless, experience clearly shows that empowerment strategies must intervene at the level of women's "Condition" while also transforming their "Position" thus simultaneously addressing both practical and strategic needs.

An organization concerned with bringing about women's empowerment must begin by locating the geopolitical region (urban or rural) in which it wants to work and identifying the poorest and most oppressed women in that area. Activists then have to be selected and trained. Intensive preparatory training is critical. It must impart to activists an awareness of the structures and sources of power, especially gender, and it must equip them with skills needed to mobilize, while learning from, the women whose consciousness they plan to raise. In general formal activists are preferable, since they are in a better position to initiate the empowerment process with other women, notwithstanding differences in class, caste or educational background. These women's collectives then begin to seek access to resources and public services independently demanding accountability from service providers, lobbying for changes in laws and programmes that are inaccessible or inappropriate and negotiating with public institutions such as bank and government departments. Collectively they may also set up and manage alternative services and programs, such as their own child care centers, saving banks or schools. Finally village or neighborhood level women's collectives may form associations at the local, regional, national and global level through poor women can more effectively challenge higher-level power structures and further empower themselves for the well-being of society as a whole.

11th Five Year Plan : The 11th plan is the greatest landmark plan for empowerment and social development of women. The new policies for social development of women are –

- i. Institution of Shree Shakti Puskar will be implemented for their social empowerment.
- ii. Initiatives will be made for preparing gender development index for states and district.

- iii. Training – cum empowerment programme for women will be implemented by the government.
- iv. District level paradigm on violence against women and helplines through I. T. for women in distress will be monitored.
- v. A national level committee to monitor supreme courts guidelines on prevention of sexual harassment of women at work place will be set-up.
- vi. Gender equality and women's empowerment: In India the collaborative actions identified to promote gender equality for the empowerment of women. These are mainly on –
 - a. Development of a gender policy analysis framework.
 - b. Support for a comprehensive gender disaggregated data base.
 - c. Assistance in developing gender-sensitive state plan.
 - d. Promotion of inter-agency action research on gender.
- vii. Education and empowerment of women –
 - a. Women empowerment also advocates that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment. The government of India has endorsed the need for promotion of women education not only through its constitutional provisions, but also in plans. Policies and programmes launched at different points of time
 - b. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process.

Empowerment of Women: Past and Present

The past of Indian women is the story of its 5000 years of civilization during which period, the history of India has largely been only "his" story. What little we know of the story of women-of the horrors of devadasis, child marriage, child widows, female seclusion etc. is largely through the eyes reformers like RajaRam Mohan Roy or the "enlightened". Weterness Macaulay, William Bentinck and Marcus Fuller. A few Indian women writers in the latter part of the last century, and the early part of this century have written about women and their experiences. But these have largely been about the educated women, the elites, the Brahmins, or about the women of those families in the forefront of political struggles. While we can be justifiably proud of these achievements, we cannot forget that today 75 percent of India's over 400 million women are illiterate, a majority of them in rural areas. Working as cultivator, agricultural laborers and rural artisan in addition to their roles as daughters, wives and mothers and subjected to myriad forms of class, casts and gender oppression. It will be appropriate here to describe the lives of some of India's contemporary women whom one is unlikely to meet in seminary or the festivals of India. The Global Gender Gap Report, 2009, a survey of 134 world economies, rank India 24th in empowering women politically with 11 percent women in parliament and 10 percent in ministerial posts. Though U.S has 17 percent women in parliament and 24 percent in ministerial posts, China and Pakistan doing better than India, ranking 60th and 55th place. India, according to this report, also fares poorly on the question of economic empowerment of women. It takes the 127th spot, with only, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arab following.

India's Gender related Development Index (GDI) rank is 113 out of 177 countries one of the best in the region if we do not count Shrilanka, way ahead at rank 89, women do not seem to be doing too badly in India, when we consider just South Asia. Percentage of women in parliament in Pakistan the figure is 23 percent, China 21 percent, Shri Lanka 6 percent and in India 11 percent held by women. India's only comfort is that it has better literacy rate than Pakistan and Nepal. In gross school enrolment of women too, India's percentage is about 87, as against 93 percent in U.S.

Schemes and programmes

1. A new schemes "Swadhar" was launched in the year 2001 with flexible and innovative approach catering to the requirements of women in difficult circumstances.
2. The *Rashriya Mahild Kosh (RMK)*: has established its credentials as the premier micro-credit agency with its focus on women and their economic empowerment through the provisions of credit to poor and assets less women in the informal sector.
3. The *Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)* endeavors to create 30 percent of the employment opportunities for women. Between 1st April 2001 and 31st March 2005, 2873.4 million man days have been generated, benefiting 761.1 million women (26.49 percent).
4. The *Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)* stipulates that houses under the scheme be allotted in the name of the women or in the joint names of the spouses.
5. The National maternity benefit scheme has recently been revamped as the *Janani Suraksha Yojana*. This scheme aims at assisting the expectant mother by providing Rs. 500/- each for the first two live

births. 6. Under the Urban Self-Employment Programme (USEP) of *Swarna Jayanti Rojagar Yojana (SJRY)* assistance is provided to the urban poor, especially women, living below the urban poverty line.

Suggestions

1. Women have to recognize their own strengths to take control of their lives. Therefore, continuous sharing of information, training and follow-up action are very essential inputs for an effecting empowering process that involves change.
2. The objective of gender budgeting will be fulfilled only when it reaches the needy and deprived women.
3. Though the actual and inevitable progress of the women could not happen yet. Development of women as well as the development by the women became the inter-related issues for the economic development of India.
4. The current strategy for women's empowerment is to capitalize the organization at behaviour of women

Conclusion

Grassroots experiments empowerment have made considerable headway since the mid-1980 but it is clear at least in South Asia that they have a long way to go. One obvious reason is the absence of a democratic environment. An empowerment process of the kind outlined here is impossible without democratic space for dissent, struggle and change. The concept of empowerment of women is a continuous mass process which includes men and women's equal participation in economical, political and social sphere. Empowerment of women is a continuing process and not a one time efforts. Therefore, women can be enabled to empower themselves with the facility of acquiring sufficient technical education. In our country considerable economic development took place, but vast inequality exists now due to lack of just and equitable distribution. The future of Indian women is closely linked to the future of the third world. The Indian women like others have a period of struggle ahead and they are prepared for it. Let us hope that the third world women, despite their numerous differences, ideologies and problems, will be able to forge a common unity. Let us also hope that women from the advanced countries, despite their own interests, will see the perspectives of the third world women.

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