

A Changing Role of Family in Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

Few decades ago, a family, a miniature of a society used to be controlled by a patriarchal ideology. Consequently, a woman's position within a family was a secondary and marginalized. She was entrapped in familial roles, duties and responsibilities, traditions and had no choice than to follow it silently. Thus, a woman was a victim of gender ideology within a family. However, it is significant to note that during a course of time, especially in 20th century a shift is observed in her position and treatment within a family. A movement of social reforms, spread of education and waves of feminism draw an attention of a society towards how gender discrimination takes place within a family. Gradually, a protest against this inequality and injustice is increased and as a result an awareness regarding women's position, rights, freedom and opportunities became a topic of public discussion. Consequently, families also underwent a drastic change in its structure, ideology and mind-set. Families realized women's potential and abilities and the need of their empowerment. The present paper attempts to analyze a role of family in women empowerment.

Key Words: Family, Women Empowerment, Gender Ideology and Equality

Introduction:

Indira Mahindra quotes from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*:

Duke: And what's her history?"

Viola: A blank, my lord . . ." (Mahindra, 183)

If a research scholar was asked to write a book not on His-story but her story, he would probably complete his study in a day. Even with great mental effort it is doubtful that he would produce more than a thin pamphlet. Yes, it was really true then when women had no status, space, scope, identity, freedom, right, opportunity, voice and choice to produce their story. But today epics would be produced on women's achievements as today they have crossed all patriarchal social and cultural barriers and have lifted themselves to the position that would write their own story.

Moving to the 21st century and to the era of globalization, we witness the drastic changes in almost all the fields. Today, we observe that half of the world's population have acquired a significant position at every level viz. familial, political, economical, educational, social and academic. Gone those days when they were seen marginalized socially and culturally. Today, women have extended their spheres from private to public sector and have proved that they are equally strong and capable like men. They are able to handle not only familial responsibilities but official too.

Offering women equal opportunities, position, space, rights and freedom in all the sphere of life means women empowerment. It expects to make women familiar with their inner strength and abilities to develop themselves, society and nation. It also means a capacity building for women for their own development through the potential they have within themselves. 'Gender Equity' and 'Gender Justice' is an essential criteria for 'Women Empowerment'.

Traditionally, women's status and role were restricted to their private sphere only and thus, they were entrapped in household duties and responsibilities. They were shackled in their

traditionally assigned roles-daughter, sister, wife and mother. However, spread of education, government's policies, laws for women, modernization, women's movements, clash with western culture and globalization assist women to bring change in their status in public sphere. It is significant to note here that it has also brought a tremendous change in women's position and role within a familial (family) level. Today's social structure has understood and accepted women's inbuilt potential and power to let them go ahead in their life.

Since an ancient period it has been observed that a family is at a centre of a society. It is a small miniature of a large society. A woman is at the centre of a family and in an era of globalization, a rapid and drastic change has also been observed in the public sphere. Nowadays, women are working independently and confidently in any society. They are successfully carrying out the responsibilities in a public sphere. They have developed themselves remarkably and their contribution to administration, academics, research, scientist, engineering, medical science and technology is definitely praise worthy.

It is significant to note here that few years ago a family was treated as a root cause of gender discrimination however, today, it is a family that is engaged in women empowerment. Thus, it can be noticed that a change has taken place in a social, cultural and familial structure which allow women to cross a threshold to shape their destiny through their qualities and careers. It has been observed that parents are giving preferences to girls' choices, likings and interests beginning with their career, job, age of marriage and life partner. Once upon a time, it was a family who used to impose their choice on girls. But nowadays, girls' individual choices comes at the centre and they are valued by a family. Earlier girls were restricted to choose a career as a teacher or a nurse but today a wide range of careers options -teacher, nurse, engineer, doctor, scientist, researcher, collector, political leader, air-hostess, model, actress, pilot, driver, conductor etc. have been accepted for them by a family. Moreover, the fields like army and navy which were strictly opened for men-have also welcomed women to prove their strength and potential. Today's families give a scope for girls' *different* career choices and accepts it proudly without grudging. Thus, it can be stated that a social structure within a parents and children especially, girls have remarkably changed nowadays. Today's familial structure takes initiative for women empowerment.

Today, not only parents but husbands are also supporting their wives in their empowering process. A typical stereotype husband-wife relationship is not found in today's familial structure. Their relationship, their roles are re-structured in the present scenario. They share household tasks and responsibilities equally. Freedom and choice of the lifestyle is given to women by their family and partners too. The role of husband and wives get interchanged as per requirement of a home.

As Indira Mahindra in her book *The Rebellious Home-Makers* quotes from Time magazine:

“Husband and wives are working out new arrangements in which the men supposedly-share household chores equally...Some couples have reversed their traditional roles- the men stay home and tend house and children, while the women go off to work... Equality... may require a greater reordering of the old sex roles with men assuming more of the domestic work load as women move into the job world.” (Mahindra, 205)

The above mentioned quote is enough to indicate that women in the present scenario are given space and scope by their family members to expose their skill and hidden talent. Women empowerment is possible as their family members are not only behind them but supporting them

whenever necessary. Earlier, a patriarchal ideology used to hamper women in their progress and growth. Women's parents were the victims of a social taboo of patriarchal mind-set. Consequently, they were unable to support the girls or women within a family to go outside to prove their capacities. However, during the course of time, a tool of education proved a weapon for women to empower themselves and thus, they broke a shackles of patriarchal mind-set and challenges the new era to accept them as an efficient workers, businesswomen, employees in a public sphere. Women who were rooted in traditions and household duties are seen today busy to establish their public identities.

With a support of a family, today, women have empowered themselves through their struggles and found out solutions for their problems. Today, they have acquired graceful position and liberated themselves from their own psyche. They have changed the social and familial framework through their spirit, character, roles and behaviour to establish their identity and self-esteem.

A credit of women empowered goes to family as it is the first institution in an individual's life. It is a family whose support and backing bring oppressed, dependent and weaker section of society i. e. women in the limelight. Women's contribution at a private sphere was unnoticed by a family and society. However, their input to public sphere is considered in the social structure which led them to empower themselves.

In our country, it is a ritual which was practiced religiously at a time of a marriage that a woman's name get changed as per her husband's wish. However, it is significant to note here that today during a marriage, woman's maternal name is not changed by her husband. On the contrary, she is allowed to use her maternal surname along with her in-laws surname. It is an indication that a society's mind-set and psyche has accepted her existence which begins with her first maternal name. This act is nothing but a boost to women empowerment.

Nowadays, an equal treatment to a son and a daughter is given and thus, a family keeps it away from gender discrimination. A equal scope and opportunity is given to them as far as education, career options, job opportunities and selection of life partner are concerned. It has been observed that there is a growing awareness of gender equality, and families are increasingly recognizing the importance of equal opportunities for their daughters and sons. Thus, a family protects a girl's right as an individual and boosts her for further progress.

Nowadays, child caring is also handled by both-husband and wife and rest of her family members. A division of work has become an inevitable as both-husband and wife are engaged in work outside home. Today, men in a family come forward to perform household duties. Earlier, child caring was supposed to a responsibility of woman only. However, nowadays. parenting is supposed to be a duty of both-husband and wife. But today, the burden of household duties and child caring is shared by every family member. She is supported emotionally and psychologically during her post-delivery period by a family. Thus, her needs are considered as a priority of family. Thus, a family plays a vital role in women's empowerment. A family's massive support makes women liberal from traditional baggage of stereotype roles and responsibilities. Nowadays, as woman has become financially independent, she is made involved in decision making process. Her opinion is valued in an important decisions like financial matters, purchasing property, investments, children's career options etc. Earlier, it was decided only by a man in a family whereas today a picture is changed and women's views are respected.

Earlier, women were not given a freedom of spending money or buying anything of her interest as she was not earning. However, today women are given liberty to spend money. Today, a woman is in a position of providing financial stability to a family. Thus, she is an economically independent which makes her empower financially.

Nowadays, freedom of family planning, timings of child birth and family size is given to women. Women have more control over their reproductive choices. Today, women's health, her wish, her career and job are given priority when a family thinks of a child planning. One of the significant changes in a perspective of a family is that today in the majority families are controlled on a single daughter. Today, no family insists for a son. This is one of the important issues of women empowerment.

Conclusion:

Women empowerment starts at home where their family plays the key role in shaping their future. Today, a family treats a girl and woman as an individual entity and gives her a scope to flourish as per her choice. A family supports her education, career, job, familial tasks and responsibilities and in every aspect of her life. Today, she is not a victim of gender ideology and social taboo. It has been understood now that gender equality is a fundamental human right and global gender. Today, her rights in every aspects are protected by a family. On the contrary, a family boosts her to establish her own identity in a public sphere. Literatures, cinemas, media-including social media-have raised voice against exploitation of women. In addition to this, many social and political movements have changed social scenario of women. Our constitution is the first constitution of the world that has given women the right of vote. Thus, all these factors paved a road for women empowerment and families have been carrying out empowerment of women.

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