

Women Empowerment in India

Neeta Rani

Research Scholar, Management Department in M. D. U. Rohtak, Haryana

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is a notable subject. At past time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some problems during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were understated as slave. From early twenty century(national movement) their statuses have been modified slowly and gradually. In this regard, I mentioned the name of the British people. After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social status of women with men. Today we have seen the women have get the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some inequalities and harassment in the society. A few number of women have been able to make their potentialities. Therefore, each and every should be careful to develop the women statuses. Women consisted of almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the fields. In the Western countries, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are seen in India even today. But the Indian women have come a long way to get the present positions by their potential and their dedication towards work.

ANCIENT TIME

Women during the early Vedic period enjoyed equal position with men in all fields of life .Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana advise that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rigvedic verses advise that women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own life partners. Scriptures such as the Rig Veda and Upanishads describe various women sages and seers, specially Gargi and Maitreyi. In approximately 500 B.C., the position of women began to decline. Although reform movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to religious orders, by and large women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The tradition of child marriages is believed to have begun around the sixth century.

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior: Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?”

- Mahatma Gandhi

The position and importance of women and related issues, have attracted the eyes of the academicians, political thinkers and social scientists both in developing as well as developed countries, partially due to the observance of the International Decade of Women (1975-85) and partially because of the widely accepted truth that a society built on the inequality of men and women involves shortage of human resources which no country can afford. With swelling literatures on empowerment of women and with huge amount of public expenditure on women empowerment schemes, it becomes important to understand the concept of empowerment of women so as to have a better understanding of its policy implications.

There are a variety of understandings of the term empowerment due to its broad usage. If empowerment is thought in terms of ability to make choices: to be disempowered therefore, implies to be denied choice. The notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the stage of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the capability to make choices acquire such ability. Thus, there could be statistical swells representing improvements in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening process includes women as agents of that change, one cannot term it as **'empowerment'**.

People who enjoy a great deal of choice in their lives may be very **powerful**, but they are not **empowered**, because they were never disempowered in the first place. Empowerment cannot be expressed in terms of specific activities or end results because it includes a process whereby women can freely analyze, develop and voice their requirements and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed from above. The assumption that planners can identify women's requirements; runs against empowerment objectives.

The present paper is aimed to develop conceptual clarity of the term empowerment delineating it with several other overlapping concepts of gender equality, social inclusion, powerful etc. and advise and advocate an inclusive approach of policy measures whereby the planners working towards an empowerment approach develop ways enabling women themselves to critically review their own position and participate in creating and shaping the society as agents of change themselves.

REASONS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Today we have looked at different Acts and Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated at every level of the society whether it is social, political and economic participation, acquire education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be financially very poor all over the India. A few women are involved in services and other activities. So, they need financial power to stand on their own legs on compare with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less educated than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is most important for Empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Another problem is workplace harassment of women. There are so many news of rape, kidnapping of girl, Dowry harassment and so on. For these reasons, they need empowerment of all types in order to secure themselves and to protect their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment would not be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, increasing education of women, and prevention and elimination of crimes against women.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The term of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist properly. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be financially independent, self-reliant, have positive attitude to enable them to face any tough situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be capable to participate in the process of decision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD-1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked for empowering women in India: A Brief Discussion 201 safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have involved some special powers to women that for reservation of seats (33%), whereas the report HRD as March 2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Finland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India "The New Panchayati Raj" is the part of the work to empower women at least at the village level. The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to protect equal rights to women. These are CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. The year of 2001 was looked as the year of women's empowerment. During the year, a landmark document has been included, 'the National Policy for the empowerment of women.' For the benefit of the women, the government has been announced different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IME) etc. The most positive development last few years has been the increasing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there are total 20, 56, 882 Panchayat members, out of this women members is 8, 38, 244 (40.48%), while total Anchalik Panchayat members is 1, 09, 324, out of this women members is 47, 455, (40.41%) and total Zila Parishad members is 11, 708, out of this women members is 4, 923 (42.05%). At the central and state levels too women are increasingly making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties leader, well developed businessmen etc. The most notable amongst these are Mrs. Pratiba Devi Singh Patil, Shila Dixit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Bindu Karat, Nazma Heptulla, Indira Nuyee (pepsi-co), BJP leader Susma Soraj, railway minister Momta Benarji, 'Narmada Basao' leader Medhapatekar, Indian Iron Woman, EX-prime minister Indira Gandhi etc. Women are also working in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have engaged into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for

a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is vary important to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers.

Consensus on Macro and Micro Indicators of Empowerment

There are various kind of ways in which indicators of empowerment can be developed. Each have some value, but none of them can be thought as complete or absolute measure, because the nature of empowerment as a multi-faceted concept means that it is not readily quantifiable. To understand empowerment it is helpful to classified indicators of empowerment into two categories: those which attempt to measure women’s empowerment at a broad societal level, in order to receive information and make difference between countries (GEM, GDI), and those which are developed in order to measure the impacts of specific projects or schemes or catalytic factors (education, employment etc.) requiring a micro approach including women themselves as agents of change.

Measuring Gender Empowerment Index

Dimension	Political participation and decision making	Economic participation and decision-making			Power over economic resources
Indicator	Female & Male shares in parliamentary seats	Female & Male shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers		Female & male shares of professional and technical positions	Female and male estimated earned income
Equality Distributed Equivalence % (EDEP)	EDEP for parliamentary representation	↘	↓		↙
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)					

There have been various efforts to devise micro indicators of empowerment. In this effort, Naila Kabeer, Linda Mayoux, Anne Marie Goetz, Rahman, Ackerley, JSI (John Show International researchers), Sara Longwe and Hashmi have given their own indicators.

JSI Six Domains of Empowerment

Domain	Expressions
1. Sense of Self & vision of a future	Assertiveness, plans for the future, future-oriented actions, relative freedom from threat of physical violence, awareness of own problems and options, actions indicating sense of security.
2. Mobility & visibility	Activities outside of the home, relative freedom from harassment in public spaces, interaction with men.
3. Economic Security	Property ownership, new skills and knowledge and increased income, engaged in new/non-traditional types of work
4. Status & decision-making power within the household	Self-confidence, controlling spending money, enhanced status in the family, has/controls/spends money, participation in/makes decisions on allocation of resources, not dominated by others
5. Ability to interact effectively in the public sphere	Awareness of legal status and services available, ability to get access to social services, political awareness, participation in credit program, provider of service in community.
6. Participation on non-family groups	Identified as a person outside of the family, forum for creating sense of solidarity with other women, self-expression and articulation of problems, participating in a group with autonomous structure.

JSI express empowerment in a behavioral sense as the ability to take effective decision encompassing inner state (sense of self, of one's autonomy, self-confidence, openness to new ideas, belief in one's own potential to act effectively) and a person's position and efficiency in social interactions. In short, it is the ability to make and carry out important decisions affecting one's own life and the lives of others.

An increasing body of research indicates that particularly used proxy variables such as education or employment are conceptually different from the dimensions of gender stratification that are hypothesized to affect the outcomes of interest in these studies, and may in some cases be irrelevant or misleading¹. In response, there have been continuously efforts at capturing the process through direct measures of decision-making, control, choice, etc. Such measures are seen as the most important representations of the process of empowerment by many authors since they are nearest to measuring agency. It could be argued that the indicators with "face validity" (i.e. indicators of empowerment based on survey questions referring to very specific, concrete actions) represent power relationships and are meaningful within a specific social context.

Certain empirical examples cited from the review of literature point out to the fact that mere swells in government programmes for empowerment of women do not guarantee women's empowered status. For example Goetz and Sen. Gupta's study of credit programs in Bangladesh challenges the assumption that loans made to women are always used by women. They found that in two-thirds of the loans in their study, men either significantly or partially controlled the credit women brought into the household. Women were unable to make their own decisions on how to invest or use the loan. This is an important finding as it supports Mayoux's point that empowerment cannot be assumed to be an automatic outcome of microfinance programs. Thus, a micro approach is required to assess the real situation.

REFERENCES

- [1]. www.wikipedia/free-encyclopedia/women-empowerment.
- [2]. www.isical.ac.in/~wemp/papers/paper-prahlad-kumar-and-tinkupaul.doc.
- [3]. KA Henderson, MD Dialeschki-Leisure Sciences,1991-Taylor & Francis-A Sense of entitlement to leisure as constraint and empowerment for women.
- [4]. Bennett, Lynn, (2002), "Using Empowerment and Social Inclusion for Pro-poor Growth: A Theory of Social Change", Working Draft of Background Paper for the Social Development Strategy Paper, Washington, DC, World Bank.
- [5]. Goetz, Anne Marie and Rina Sen Gupta, (1996), "Who takes the credit? Gender, Power, and Control over Loan Use in Rural Credit Programs in Bangladesh." *World Development* 24(1), pp. 45-63.
- [6]. Hashemi, Syed M., Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Ann P. Riley, (1996), "Rural Credit Programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh." *World Development* 24(4), pp. 635-653.
- [7]. Kabeer, Naila, (2001), "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", in *Discussing Women's Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, Sida Studies No. 3. Novum Grafiska AB, Stockholm.
- [8]. Kumar, Prahlad and Paul, Tinku, (2004), "Informalization and Need for Gender Sensitive Statistics", paper presented in a National Conference by Indian Political Economy Association on 'Globalization, State and the Weaker Sections' held at G.B Pant Social Science Institute on 11-12 June, 2004.