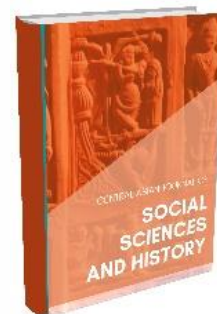




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Issues and Concerns of Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

Empowerment as a process allows one to gain knowledge, skill-sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives. The concept of empowerment dates back to the 1960s, particularly in the realm of Afro-American movement. Concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference and reflected women's empowerment as a key strategy for development. This paper presents how empowerment is instrumentally important for achieving positive development outcomes and well-being of life, emphasising the 'doing' and 'being' what one values and have reason to value. It discusses that empowering women has been the central agenda for both government and civil society driven sectoral interventions. empowerment of women leads to individual consciousness raising, collective consciousness development and mobilisation. One of the key factors of women empowerment is Education of Women. Education has emerged as a powerful tool of social transformation and is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person and in particular women.

Education is the prominent factor that can incredibly improve the status of women in any society by ensuring their overall participation in the decision-making process and access to power that are fundamental for achievement of equality, development, peace, economic self reliance, legal rights and protection against all forms of discrimination.

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Women empowerment is a contested subject. In pre vedic period, women enjoyed equal status as with men. The textual sources Rigveda and Upanishads mentions dialogue and discussions portraying intellectual ability of women by famous dialogue between Sage Yagvalkaya and Gargi- Maitreyi. The situational position of women in society faced some difficulties during post-Vedic period. Discrimination, subjugation and a lower strata than Men being the practice raised questions on the existence of women as persons. From late nineteenth early twentieth century women is said to empowered themselves and brought in the change in their status slowly and gradually. In India, post Independence the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demanded equal social position of women with men. Women today have achieved respectable positions in all spheres with struggle and theoretical support of Women's writings.

CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Word 'Empowerment' is said to appear in the book *'Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities'* (1976) by Barbara Solomon and eventually the term came in usage by social scientists and researchers. The term was also used parallelly to indicate feminism, civil rights movements, Black power Movements and Gandhism. It also developed as a synonym with certain political and social thoughts. Thus giving arise to various definitions, interpretations and social progress. One of the Various definitions of empowerment, refer to granting of power, rights, authority to perform various acts or duties. Also having the knowledge, the ability to use this knowledge by authority, power by self control of themselves and life situations. It is referred as largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation. Other definition refers to it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. The form that empowerment takes place is primarily as an individual process and latterly used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security. responsibility. It is also positioning individuals and communities responsible for their own social security and welfare, without seeking necessary support and resources from government. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 Governments committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This commitment was operationalised and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 4- 15, September 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations." It also emphasized women's participation in decision-making process and access to power considering them as fundamental for the achievement of equality development and peace with a convince that Women's rights are human rights. Empowerment structures at three levels: empowerment at the individual level , Secondly at group, societal and community level and the third as interaction between these. The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal. The group level deals with the collective action and sense of agency that woman experience together, in a group. 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, how women should behave, live and be in a pattern. The different levels

are seen as 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 a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self esteem and sense of agency. Female empowerment is measured by a woman's ability to make household decisions, relative to her husband's ability to make household decisions. Since this ability cannot be explicitly measured, economists study whether variables such as education and asset- ownership are correlated with high female empowerment. (Strandberg 2002)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A NECESSITY

On the one hand women have been at the centre of society building and creation of History and on the other hand women have undergone patriarchal implications. Mentioning deprivation, degradation and exploitation, specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sectors of the society. They are commodified, objectified, materialized and subjugated. They face inhuman exploitation and discrimination. Women haven't been completely empowered and still witness certain social ills as female foeticide, dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women. The male female ratio though improved over last few years is still far from satisfactory. The female literacy rate is also lower than the male literacy rate. Different Acts and Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India aren't being the supposed support to empower women at large. Women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society, social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Financial independence to women and of women is at large, dependent on Men. Increasing education among women is a very important factor to empower women. Nutritional deficiency and immortality rate is a health concern of women. Harassment of women at work place is critical aspect of women empowerment. The persistence of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women." The term was coined by Amartya Sen in a now classic article in the New York Review of Books (Sen, 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men, as they do in sub-Saharan Africa. For each missing woman, there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men. In labour market opportunities: women are less likely to work, they earn less than men for similar work, and are more likely to be in poverty even when they work. Women spend almost twice as much time on housework, almost five times as much time on child care, and about half as much time on market work as men do (Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo, 2011). In political representation: women constituted just 19.4 percent of the members of lower and upper houses of parliaments in July 2011 (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2011). In legal rights: women in many countries still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their husband's consent.

Certain arenas, political, economical and social have determined women's status only in terms of household work. All three being equally important for an individual to make life efforts. Women were denied their participation by patriarchal system by defining and limiting their roles and spaces only in terms of home maker and care takers of houses. There is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development-in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political

participation. In one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, continuing discrimination against women can, as Sen has forcefully argued, hinder development. Empowerment can, in other words, accelerate development. Policymakers and social scientists have tended to focus on one or the other of these two relationships. Those focusing on the first have argued that gender equality improves when poverty declines. (Duflo 2011) In the United Nation's 2005 report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, writes: "The full participation of women to all levels of decision-making is a basic human right." The second, a central argument in the discourse of policymakers, is that women play a fundamental role in development. The gender gap in education, political participation, and employment opportunities should therefore be reduced not only because it is equitable to do so, but also because it will have beneficial consequences on many other society-wide outcomes. It should be done, in other words, to increase efficiency.

Accordingly, in the same report, Kofi Annan argues that gender equality is in fact a "pre-requisite" to achieving the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and eliminating the gender gap in education by 2015 (United Nations, 2005). In its report, "Engendering Development," (The World Bank, 2001) calls for policies to address gender imbalance in "rights, resources, and voice," and recommends that institutional structures be overhauled to promote equality, and that specific measures, such as girls' scholarships and quotas for women in parliament, be adopted. These measures are justified, according to the report, not only because they promote equity, but also because they are necessary to accelerate development. Interestingly, the 2012 World Development Report (World Bank, 2011) adopts a much more nuanced message. While it emphasizes the "business case" for women empowerment, it mainly takes it as given that the equality between women and men is a desirable goal in itself, and policies should aim to achieve that goal. An experiment conducted by (Jensen, 2010a) provides another clear demonstration of how an increase in available opportunities can benefit girls more than boys. Empirically, there is a strong correlation between economic development and women's legal rights, in areas as diverse as property rights, access to land, access to bank loans, violence against women, abortion policy, etc. (Doepke and Tertilt, 2009) argue that, when the importance of human capital in the economy increases (with technological progress), men start to be willing to surrender some rights to women to ensure that children get better educated. The argument requires that women care more about children's human capital and that bargaining power matter for household decisions, with economic growth and a decline in fertility, the balance starts tilting towards the latter interest, and women's economic rights are expanded. Doepke and Tertilt provide some historical narrative that is consistent with their theory, and Fernandez some suggestive evidence from the granting of rights to women in the United States that states that had a faster reduction in fertility were more likely to expand women's rights. The stance that women empowerment is desirable for efficiency shapes both the policy debate and the resultant economic policies the world over.

A study of the determinants of female autonomy in India finds that a better-educated woman has greater bargaining power, as measured by physical mobility and say in household resource allocation, through the channel of increased information (Rahman and Rao, 2004). The same study also finds culture, as measured by state fixed-effects, to significantly increase bargaining power despite controlling for religion and caste. Further evidence from India shows strong positive correlations between female education as a proxy for bargaining power, and freedom of movement and better

maternal health as bargaining outcomes (Malhotra, Pande and Grown, 2003). Clearing of marriage markets depends on the number of men and women in the market (Neelakantan and Tertilt, 2008). Empowerment is vesting power to an individual by certain modes wherever there is lack of noted aspects required for development. Empowerment of women portrays endowment of women to be economically independent, self-reliant and rendering self-esteem. The indicators of a high level of empowerment include (1) access to outside employment, (2) physical mobility, and (3) political participation (Anderson and Eswaran, 2009).

Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD- 1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) of India have been working to enhance the rights and legal rights to women. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have granted some special powers to women for reservation of seats (33%) in legislation. Various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women have been ratified by the government of India. 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) being the major sources of action plans. 2001 was the year of Women's empowerment. The National Policy for the empowerment of women a landmark document was been adopted in 2001. Its aim is to ensure women empowerment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women in order to realize their full potential. It enforces equal access to women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economical life of the nation. Human development issues of home child rearing, education, health have always been taken care by women. So economic development of women becomes the field of participation and involvement of women and have been considered as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country. The Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. The conscious efforts of constitution maker ensured these aspects of women empowerment. Constitution also empowers the states to adopt policies with regard to women empowerment. Article 50 of the Constitution provides special status and protection of women and to this extent equates them with those who belong to the deprived section of society. The directive principle of state policy (article 39) provides equal pay for equal work irrespective of their sex. Article 243 and article 243(1) provide various laws passed for the protection and safeguard of women and their rights like Hindu marriage and Divorce Act, 1955. To eradicate several social ills with regard to women several new bills have been introduced in the parliament empowering legality for women Listed below the efforts to provide legality to women empowerment.

Women and Legality

- ✓ The Hindu Widow Re-Marriage Act of 1856
- ✓ The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929
- ✓ The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937
- ✓ Factories Act 1948, Minimum Wages Act 1948
- ✓ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- ✓ Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- ✓ The Hindu Guardianship Act 1956
- ✓ The suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956-57

- ✓ The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (& amended in 2005)
- ✓ The Maternity Benefit Act 1961
- ✓ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- ✓ The Indian Divorce Act, 1969
- ✓ The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971,
- ✓ Equal Remuneration Act 1976
- ✓ The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976
- ✓ Family Courts Act, 1984
- ✓ Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- ✓ The Indecent Representation of Women Act, 1986
- ✓ The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- ✓ The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique Act, 1994
- ✓ The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Amendment Act 2002
- ✓ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- ✓ The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- ✓ The Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill 2007
- ✓ The Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- ✓ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005
- ✓ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019

Women empowerment is to draw clear demarcations against powerful structural forces of the society that are against women's growth and development. Setting up SHG'S at Panchayat raj level were the main programmes that catalysed women empowerment at grass root level. UNDP also incorporated issues of women upliftment as Primary objective. Establishment of National Women's Commission in 1990 and State's Women Commission were significant aspects that contributed to Empowerment of Women.

WOMEN RELATED SCHEMES OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)
- ✓ Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) Scheme
- ✓ Indira Mahila Yojana
- ✓ Rashtriya Mahila Kosh
- ✓ Mahila Samridhi Yojana
- ✓ Swayamsidha Programme

- ✓ Support to Training-cum-Employment for Women (STEP)
- ✓ Self help groups
- ✓ Sakhi Centres, the Scheme of One Stop Centre (OSC) is being implemented across the country since 1st April, 2015
- ✓ Scheme of Universalisation of Women Helpline implemented since 1st April, 2015 (Tollfree Number is 181).
- ✓ Swadhar Greh Scheme
- ✓ Working Women Hostel Scheme
- ✓ Sakhi Dashboard is an online MIS platform which was rolled out in October, 2019
- ✓ National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO)
- ✓ Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC)
- ✓ SHe-Box (www.shebox.nic.in): Online Complaint Management System for lodging complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace
- ✓ National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001
- ✓ National Credit Fund for Women (1993)
- ✓ Food and Nutrition Board (FNB)
- ✓ Information and Mass Education (IME).

To benefit women the government floated different schemes and programs. Strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions by participation of women is the outcome of development process for women. Many women have participated and have been elected as representatives at village council level, Anchalik panchayat members and Zila parishad members. Economic development of women centres around cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery and other care taking aspects.

As a practice women are themselves not aware of their rights so it creates an unfavourable situation to existence of women. Being the centre of the society women's need, interest and health care needs to be addressed at the primary level. A practice of supportive growth and development in terms of rights, education and participation would provide equal status in the society. So is the need for policy framing. Gender disparity in wages, status, resource mobilization needs to be recognized and resolved in order for a woman to be at par with men.

Difference between women and women needs to be identified. The status quo of rural women and urban women is created due to economic independence and literacy. Both the category of women has internal as well as external differences. The external differences mark for rich women and poor women. Whereas the internal difference is sorted on the basis of decision making powers, economic independence, freedom to make choices, property ownership and participation. There has been lack of participation of women in their own emancipation due to negligence and marginalisation. 70% of domestic workers in India are from Rural, low caste, and tribal women. It creates an unregulated and unorganized sector. Poor rural women doesn't have access to education and related resources whereas upper middle class uplifted and entered workforce sector due to educational benefits and other skill training that were affordable by them.

Women empowerment still has certain implementational gaps. Violence against women in India is widespread and the consequences for perpetrators rarely match the crime. Enforcement of laws and sentencing of perpetrators are long and arduous processes, and the gaps in these processes are further widened by corruption. Another gap is the inaccessibility of information on victims' rights among rural and less educated women. Additionally, social stigma and the fear of abandonment by the family play a big role in women and girls' ability or inability to access laws and policies to address sexual and physical violence. (Upadhyaya 2012). It was only during Fifth Five Year Plan that women and their causes were started giving special attention. Central Social Welfare Board, an apex body of the voluntary sector was set up and it aids more than 10,000 NGOs across the country, helping women stand on their own through such programmes as socio-economic programme, vocational training and other similar programmes. Self-help groups (SHGs) are a widely practiced model for social and economic mobility. SHGs provide women with the opportunity to manage loans and savings that can be used by members for varying needs. SHGs also are used to promote social change among the members and the community at large. Women's contribution to Indian economy and Indian Economical development are developing on correlation. Indian economy has put in efforts for mainstreaming Women's contribution by improving social and economical status.

Former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, addressing the Fourth UN Conference on Women, said: Education for girls has a catalytic effect on every dimension of development: lower child and maternal mortality rates; increased educational attainment by daughters and sons; higher productivity; and improved environmental management.

Together, these can mean faster economic growth and, equally important, wider distribution of the fruits of growth. More education for girls will also enable more and more women to attain leadership positions at all levels of society: from health clinics in the villages to parliaments in the capitals. This, in turn, will change the way societies will deal with problems and raise the quality of global decision-making. Education of women is equally significant for their individual development and as a result important for society. Education dwells opportunities of social change, employment and decision making powers that are important for empowerment of women. Education is an empowerment tool for all women. Educated women performs her routine work of household, child health, response to abuses, violence, participation in societal works and economic advancements. Women empowerment is to improve women's ability to access development aspects of education, political and social participation, health, and to avail professional opportunities. As to be autonomous of her own life situations. Education and Women empowerment are directly related and reciprocal. Relative physical mobility is another important determinant of autonomy, defined as degree of control over microcredit loans, since it reflects the woman's access to outside employment opportunities (Hashemi, Schuler and Riley, 1996).

CONCLUSION

The Empowerment of women is the central issue of 21st century. Providing legality to women, Managing resources of Education, Health Care for wome are supporting grounds to empower them. Opening up of opportunities Social, Political and Economical have changed their status. They are considered equal with men in income generation but still lack participation in decision making of social and political spheres. Women have attained this status after long struggles of their existence and position in the above spheres. Development is detrimental without women empowerment. A holistic

development without gender discrimination can be viable by creating strong implementing policies for women. In 21st century of technology interventions a few women have been able to successfully establish their potentialities. Where they had overcome discrimination and harassment. To ease out women's struggle through empowerment is most vital to strengthen the future women of India. Women empowerment process needs an acceleration so as to make women self-conscious, develop self-esteem, self mobilization and avail opportunities to the fullest of their development. A culture free of gender discrimination, full opportunities of Self Decision Making and women's participation in Social, Political and Economic life of the country with a sense of equality should be created.

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