



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – THE INDIAN SCENARIO

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INTRODUCTION

The term women empowerment is interpreted in different ways by many. But it really refers to the increase and improvement in the spiritual, social, political and economic strengths and capacities of all women concerned.

As a result of this empowerment in their capacities, the women experience a development in the level of their confidence. After true improvement a women will have the following capabilities like the power of making decisions for self. She will have access to resources and information for right decision-making instead of satisfying herself with yes/no or an either/or, she is empowered with lots of options at her disposal to choose from. In a situation where she has to make decisions collectively, she can show assertiveness. She is gifted with capacity to think positively if there is a need for a change. She has been provided with the ability and potential to develop and cultivate new skills for group power and also for improvement of the self. She is entrusted with the power of using democratic means and methods to bring about the change in the perception of other people. She is capable to adopt to changes and also to a self-initiated and never ending process of growth. She is empowered to overcome stigmas and can stay focused on building and increasing positive self-image.

DEFINITIONS OF THE OF THE TERM EMPOWERMENT

Robert Adams is of the impression that any single definition of the term ‘Empowerment’ will be inadequate. A very minimal definition has been offered by him. According to him, “Empowerment: the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and offers to maximize the equality of their lives.” (1)

In the opinion of Cornell Empowerment Group, “Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.” (2).

Rappaport has defined it as “Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organization and communities gain mastery over their lives.” (3)

As a methodology, Empowerment has connections with feminism also. To put in more clear and precise terms, Empowerment is the process of securing basic opportunities for the marginalized people either directly through and by themselves or with the assistance of non- marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. Actively and enthusiastically thwarting the attempts and efforts to deny those opportunities is also an important part of it. In the process of Empowerment comes activity like encouraging and promoting the skills for self-sufficiently. The focus of this is to eliminate the future need for charity or welfare in the members of the group. It is not only very hard to start this process but is also difficult to see it implemented effectively. There are many strategies that can be adapted and utilized for facilitating improvement. The most relevant is dealt with here. That is to help and enable marginalized people to create their own nonprofit organization. The rationale to be used here is that only the marginalized people themselves can understand what their own people want and need most. They also have to be aware of the fact that leaving the control of the organization in the hands of others can entrench marginalization. Hence, it is noticed that the process of Empowerment enables individuals and groups to procure completely and fully not only power which is personal or collective, but also authority and influence, and then to utilize the strength received while dealing either with other people, or institutions and society. Therefore, Ken Blachard opines that “Empowerment is not giving people power, people already plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificently. We define Empowerment as letting this power out.” (4)

Truly as per this definition Empowerment is co-help people how to recognize the latent store of potential in them and to assist them to make use of that power. This process serves as an encouragement to the people concerned to acquire the skills and knowledge that will enable them to face the challenges and difficulties in their work. Empowerment and will facilitate their progress and development within themselves and in the society they belong to. Thus it is observed that Empowerment happens on account of the improvement in conditions, standards, events and a global perspective of life.

In this context it is necessary to ascertain as to how far the Empowerment approach is applicable to all in general. To support this idea Albert Lenz clarifies that “People behave primarily regressive in acute crisis situations and trend to leave the responsibility to professionals.” (5).



Hence before implementing the concept of Empowerment a satisfactory level of communication and reflectively of the persons involved in it are essential.

EFFECTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN VARIOUS FIELDS

Empowerment occurs in different fields. The effect of this varies from one field to the other. In the field of **Social work** it provides the women with an attitude and approach to increase the capacity for self-help of their clients. Adams Robert explain this phenomenon as “This allows clients not to be seen as passive, helpless ‘victims’ to be rescued but instead as a self- Empowered person fighting abuse oppression; a fight in which the social worker takes the position of a facilitator, instead of the position of a ‘rescuer’. (5) .

In the field of Economics , Empowerment concentrates on mobilizing the self-help efforts of the poor women rather than supplying them social welfare. Thus the previously disadvantaged sections of the population becomes Empowered. Through **legal** Empowerment not only the marginalized women but all women in general use the legal mobilization to improve or transform their social, political or economic situations. Publications related to legal empowerment claim that “Legal empowerment approaches are interested in understanding how they can use the law to advance interest and priorities of the marginalized”. (6) Thus legal empowerment increases the capacity of all women to utilize their rights, either as individuals or as members of a community.

The concept of **Gender Empowerment** refers to the Empowerment of women. Now a day it has become a significant topic of discussion related to development and economics. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns while addressing human rights and development. So far this paper dealt with the concept of Women Empowerment in general. Now it will focus on concept and the conditions in Indian context.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

While analyzing the situation of women Empowerment in India, it is found that it has become a burning issue all over the world since the last few decades and India is not an exception. In these modern times on account of her gender, women cannot be asked and expected to wait further. A closer look will reveal that women demanded equality with men in spheres of education, employment, inheritance, marriage and politics. Of late, she had asked for the same in religion also to have equal rights with men to serve as cleric or priest. This quest of the women for equality has resulted in the formation of many Women’s Associations and initiation of deferent movements.

A look at the 20th century show that the position and status of women has improved beyond exception all over the world in the 20th century. But the condition of the same in India was found very low in the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period women considered and treated like mere objects or commodities that can be purchased and sold at one’s disposal.

The book ‘Manusmriti’ and the writings of the great poet Manu are sufficient evidence to prove this fact. A close look at the picture of Indian women of those times reveals that, for a long time, she remained or was forced to remain within the four walls of her household. Women in India had to depend on man for everything and that too totally. They had to fight since a long time, almost for more than a century to gain property rights, voting rights, equality in civil rights, before the law in matters of marriage and employment. Fortunately for Indian Women, there was no need for her to struggle for voting rights as can be found in other countries. Other than the above mentioned rights, Indian women had witnessed the eradication of the customs of purdha (well system), female infanticide, child marriage, Sati system, dowry system and conditions of permanent widowhood fully or to a great system extent after independence through legislative measures.

ADVANTAGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

A deeper analysis of the achievements of Indian women reveals another feather in her cap. That is the enactment of two acts bringing about the emancipation of women. One is the Act of 2005 protecting women from domestic violence and the other is compulsory registration of marriage Act of 2006. Domestic Violence act helps women also to fight against domestic violence of all types and also to root out physical as well as mental abuse. In this case, anything that will make a woman to feel inferior and which takes away her self-respect is considered as abuse.

The Act of compulsory Registration of marriage too had benefited women a lot. Most significantly, this has prevented the abuse of the institution of marriage and the phenomenon of hindering social justice with regards to women. In large numbers, who are abandoned by their husbands and who have no other means to prove their marital status. This will also prove highly beneficial to prevent and stop child marriages, the systems of bigamy , polygamy etc. This will enable helpless women to seek maintenance from husbands as well as the claim of custody of their children. Widows are empowered through this act to



claim inheritance rights for themselves and their children. The beauty of this Act is that it is applicable to all women in India, irrespective of their cast, creed or religion. This has proved to be a great step in empowering the otherwise helpless women of India to exercise their rights which were denied to them in ancient times.

As a result of this legislative measures adopted to raise the status of Indian women, they were permitted to leave the four walls of the house that enveloped them and to come out in the open and to work shoulder to shoulder with men in almost all fields. It is a known fact that now a days girls out perform boys in studies be it in schools, colleges or professionals and carrier oriented fields. More and more women are getting enrolled in educational institutes of higher learning and securing degrees, earning their livelihood and becoming more and more self dependant. They have come out of the chains of slavery and dependence that that had suppressed them so far. It is not surprising to see that many big and famous companies prefer women for the top possessions in their organizations Indra Noogi, Chanda Kochar etc. are the shining stars in this realm.

In the present scenario, more and more women are playing bigger and bigger role in the economic fields in various capacities such as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers, investors etc. A report 'The Economist' is sufficient to prove this fact. The report entitled 'Women and the World Economy' claim that "only one third of American women of working age had a paid job." (7) What does this refer to? It reveals that more women prefer to engage themselves in works/business of their own than working under somebody's hand.

It is true that women were deprived of education in ancient times. But there was a time when women's education was not a priority even among the elite. It has already been discussed above that since the last quarter of the 20th century, the number of women entering in to the economic field and seeking remuneration jobs outside the family. The best example today is that of America were women make up almost half of America's work force. The picture seen today is quite clear, almost in every country, including India, more women are employed. Now women are seen in almost every field. Be it that of architecture, lawyers, financial services, hospitality, industry, engineering, medical and IT jobs. Women have overtaken men within no time. More and more number of women are capturing domains previously reserved only for males. Some examples are that of Police, drivers in autos, buses etc, army, pilots, chartered accountants, commandos, working in petrol pumps etc. It is not at all shocking to see all women run police stations, hotels etc. nowadays.

One of the major factors that had accelerated the demand for educated female labor force in almost all fields is the rapid pace of economic development. Modern women, are earning as much as or even more than their husbands and their employment had added substantially to their family which gives them an economic advantage over the family with only one bread winner. This had brought economic power in the hand of women who were previously dependent on males for the same. This economic independence provided women with had Empowerment and confidence to lead a better life. Thus now they have the freedom to take more personal decisions and have a say in the family affairs. This new pattern of empowered working women has improved the status of women in many ways. The sum total of the story is that economic independence of women has changed their overall equations, perspective and outlook. It has also affected gender relationships. Now conjugal relationships are based more on freedom and desire than conventions, customs and tradition.

CONCLUSION

In the present scenario, the picture is that of women on equal status with men. Rural women need more empowerment and development. This in turn will result in a change in the society. Society has to enhance its efforts for women Empowerment and to boost the progress achieve by women. Today women are ruling over the world and making their mark in different fields with their hard work and dedication. Though women are not treated as an object or as a slave and have become independent, the male psyche needs to change so that crimes like rape and abuse of women will end forever. Women are doing wonderful as they could strike the perfect balance between their social, personal and professional life. The top position climbed by women is the contribution of Empowerment coupled with their sincerity, hard work and dedication.

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