



Revisiting Ideas and thoughts of Women Empowerment

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Abstract: In Indian context, it is seen various initiatives for empowerment of women in both economic and socio-political aspects. Five-year plan, specially from 6th plan period, played significant role in empowering women. The government of India has enforced many policies and programme for the empowerment of women including Swayamsidha, Working Women's Hostel, Swadhar, Short Stay Home, Ujjawala yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan, Sukanya Samridhi Account, National Policy for Empowerment of Women, Self Help Group (SHG) etc. Besides that, there are several prominent acts which empower women. The national policy for the empowerment of women aims to bring the advancement, development and empowerment of women in social, political, economic, cultural and civil spheres. India made 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment towards 33% reservation of seats for the women in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban bodies respectively. It strengthens the political rights of women at grassroots level. The women reservation act provides sub reservation process for OBC, SC & ST women. The women get chances to become either a sarapanch or a naib sarapanch at gram panchayat level and chairperson or a vice chairperson at the Zilla parishad and Panchayat Samiti level. As such women empowerment measures have been found in different policies and schemes in India.

Keyword: Empowerment, development, Policies, Programmes, Equality, Sustenance

Introduction

Recently, a number of policies, programmes and schemes are implemented for the economic sustenance of women in rural and urban areas. A such, women in current times are being empowered socially, economically, politically and many other fields. Generally, women's empowerment has been an issue of immense discussions over the last few decades world-wide. This has been added in most government plans

and programs as well. Efforts have been made on a regular basis across nations to address this issue and enhance the socio-economic status of women. However, it has been observed that most of the policies and programs view empowerment in the economic sense only working in the belief that economic self-reliance empowers women. Five-year Plan in India has taken number of initiatives towards women's development through plans, policies, and schemes. Socio economic prospects for women have been exercised through different training programme, sensitization programmes, and capacity building measures. The concern of gender equality has been focused in the plan period. The report "Towards Equality" submitted by Committee on Status of Women in India made tremendous changes in the status of women in India and it fosters socio economic empowerment of women in India.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a term which is achieved by the people themselves through their own effort. Through empowerment a greater form of participation, capacity building and decision making are achieved. Empowerment facilitates a person to achieve collective strength and entailing the involvement of technical, managerial and administrative skills of local people. The word empowerment is connoted to the social action process that increases participation of people, organizations and communities in taking control over their lives in their community. Empowerment process does not mean in achieving power to dominate the people at large rather to achieve power in changing the society and people. The notion of empowerment may be examined or interpreted from different angles, levels and perspectives. It always points out on particular sections within a society and interprets in different ways such as empowerment of citizens, empowerment of consumers and empowerment of weaker sections.

The empowerment can be broadly divided into four dimensions which includes cognitive, psychological, economic and political. Cognitive deals with one's ability and experiences to identify patterns of behavior which lead to dependence. Psychological deals with competence in making decisions at the personal and social levels in order to improve one's situation. Basically, it is associated with the women's feelings and belief themselves. Economic deals with the ability of women to link with income generating activities. It facilitates the women to become independent in the sphere of income activities. Economic dimension provides ample opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills by which he / she will be independent enough in

high job profile. Political deals with the ability to reflect the situations politically and entails steps for social change. All these dimensions of empowerment focus on the achievement and increase of status. There are different empowerment circles, groups, communities including empowerment of farmers, empowerment of women, empowerment of cooperative members, empowerment of slum dwellers and many more segments. However, this section deals with women empowerment in theoretical aspects.

Women Empowerment

In theoretical sense, women empowerment is to be understood as the process which facilitates women to realize their full identity and power in all levels of activities. It can be considered as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. These components include women's awareness building, steps towards gender equality in eliminating discrimination, exercising equal rights, capacity building and skill development, participating in decision making process, making steps for social awareness, and carrying out of different activities etc. Women empowerment is a process which neutralizes women's oppression. It tries to end the spirit of inequality among men and women in society. By this process women gain increased power which assists them for challenging male dominated power structures. Such spirit enables women to find an alternative solution where women have equal access to control over resources and influence decision making in the sphere of political, social and economic field of both public and private sphere.

Women empowerment increases potential at individual and social level. It is linked with women's movements, and women's struggles for gaining social status and ending of social inequality at macro level. In the micro level it is linked with women's movement for peace, ecology, human rights, democratic rights, domestic violence and sexual offence at work place. Women empowerment is a step taken by the government which implies positive action and participatory role of women in the decision-making bodies. Empowerment does not mean only the women's liberation from patriarchal institutions but it implies the development of women in all spheres-intellectual, moral, political and socio-economic.

Global context

The writings of different feminists thinkers of Liberal, Radical, Marxian and Socialistic feminism have influenced the women's movement and women empowerment in

global sphere. Besides the influence of feminist political ideologies and phases of women's movement, the United Nations (UN) organized international conferences like first conference held at Mexico, second conference held at Copenhagen, the third conference held at Nairobi and the last and fourth conference held at Beijing. These conferences focused on the gender development in general and women development in particular.

The Mexico conference of the year 1975 was organized to correlate with International Women's Year. Around 133 number of governments participated, while 6000 number of non-governmental organizations representatives joined in the said conference. The prime objective of the conference was to develop a world plan of action for the implementation of the objectives of International Women's Year. Its targets had been given for assessment by the year 1985. The conference got success in getting response from many countries. The Copenhagen conference was organized in the year 1980 by the UN with focus point on women's employment, health and education. Around 145 number of member states joined. The conference highlighted on implementation of the goals of the first world conference. The issues of human rights, child custody, nationality and improvement of socio-economic status had been reviewed. The Nairobi conference was held in the year 1985 after a decade of 'UN declaration'. Its aim was to review and appraise the last two conferences. Around 1900 numbers of delegates from 157 numbers member states and 12000 numbers of delegates from NGOs attended in the world conference. It basically focused on the developmental aspects which were taken for women empowerment. The outcome of the conference forced member states to make assessment, outline measures for gender equality and prepare needful strategy. It also made efforts for promoting women's participation in peace and development efforts.

The last world conference was held at Beijing in the year 1995 with significant remarks and point for global agenda for gender equality. The said conference was designated as 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'. Its soul goal was for women's empowerment which pointed the key global policy document on gender equality. The conference gave emphasis on twelve critical areas of concern for Gender empowerment in general and Women empowerment in particular. Thus, the twelve areas include, first, women and poverty; second, education and training of women; third, women and health; fourth, violence against women; fifth, women and armed conflict; sixth, women and economy; seventh, women in power and decision making; eighth, institutional mechanism for advancement of women; ninth, women

and human rights; tenth, women and media; eleventh, women and environment and twelfth and last the girl child. Total 189 numbers of countries participated in the conference. India also attended in the conference. Moreover, around 17000 numbers of delegates participated including 6000 numbers of government delegates at the negotiations, 4000 accredited NGOs representatives and 4000 numbers of media representatives and along with international civil servants.

The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was another effort at the international level for women empowerment. It was adopted in 1979 which had great impact in the field of protecting women from different violence. It has different articles which are related to women's economic empowerment. As such, article 10 focuses on equal rights to education, article 11 deals with women equal employment, remuneration, and protection opportunities regardless of pregnancy, maternity and marital status, article 13 highlights on women's equal rights to family benefits and financial services, and article 15 says men and women's equality before the law. In this convention 189 numbers of state parties gave consent.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was another initiative at the global level at the time of project inception in July 2002. The said aspects enforced eight major goals. These includes,

- (i) Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger
- (ii) Achieve Universal Primary Education
- (iii) Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- (iv) Reduce Child Mortality
- (v) Improve Maternal Health
- (vi) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
- (vii) Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- (viii) Develop Global Partnership for Development

In the year 2013 the MDG report was released with more targets achieved by 2015. The report contains "areas that requires urgent attention such as, one of every eight people of world remain hungry, death of women during childbirth, although facilities to protect them are available, lack of improved sanitation facilities, a major health and environmental hazard".

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) took place after MDGs. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution entitled "Transforming our world

the 2030: the agenda for sustainable development” on 25th September 2015. The agenda came into force on 1st of January 2016 and entails 17 numbers of sustainable development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets which are to be achieved by year 2030. Gender aspects are the relevant across all 17 numbers of SDGs. Basically, these aspects relate to women’s economic empowerment. SDG commits all governments to take actions to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’.

The Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), are the reflection of a collaboration between the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Global Compact. It was launched in the year 2010. It establishes high level corporate leadership for gender equality. Its thrust area includes “treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination, ensure the health, safety, and well being of all women and men workers, promote education and training”. Around 1000 numbers of Chief Executives world wide have signed the CEO statement of support for the WEPs and from among them around 529 numbers of the signatory companies are European.

Indian context

After independence, Indian has been taking various initiatives for empowerment of women in both economic and socio-political aspects. It was found more aggressive in Sixth Five-year plan onwards. As such, Sixth five year plan, for the first time, introduced a chapter on Women and Development which targeted rural poor women. That plan declared that “a fair share of the employment opportunities would have to be created through poverty alleviation programmes. The assumptions continued to be that employment and income generation would automatically lead to improvement in the status of women. Then a separate ministry for women and children was created. Issues pertaining to rural women’s advancement were identified by three planning groups of government of India. They were, first, the core group of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP); second, the working group on development of village-level organization of rural women; and third, the national committee on the role and participation of rural women in agriculture and rural development.

The government of India has enforced many policies and programme for the empowerment of women. Prominent among them are:

- i) Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

- ii) Development of women and children of rural areas (DWCRA)
- iii) Training of rural youth of self employment (TRYSEM)
- iv) National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREP)
- v) Rural Ladies Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP)
- vi) Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
- vii) Swawalamban
- viii) Swayamsidha
- ix) Working Women's Hostel
- x) Swadhar
- xi) Short Stay Home
- xii) Rajib Gandhi National Crèche Scheme (RGNCS)
- xiii) Ujjawala
- xiv) National Rural Health Mission
- xv) Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao
- xvi) Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan
- xvii) Sukanya Samridhi Account
- xviii) National Policy for Empowerment of Women
- xix) Self Help Group (SHG)

Besides that there are several prominent acts which empower women.

- i) The Hindu marriage act- 1955
- ii) The Hindu succession act- 1956
- iii) The Factory act- 1948
- iv) The Dowry Prohibition act- 1961
- v) The Medial Termination of Pregnancy act- 1971
- vi) The Domestic Violence act - 2005
- vii) The Child Marriage Protection act – 2006
- viii) The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal act- 2013

ix) The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019

The national policy for the empowerment of women aims to bring the advancement, development and empowerment of women in social, political, economic, cultural and civil spheres. India made 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment towards 33% reservation of seats for the women in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban bodies respectively. It strengthens the political rights of women at grassroots level. The act provides sub reservation process for OBC, SC & ST women. The women get chances to become an either a chairperson or a vice chairperson.

Conclusion

The women empowerment notion has become a wider sense in present scenario. The strategy for women empowerment has roots in women's movement. However, the women's movement has been progressed through different wave of feminism, namely, first wave, second wave, third wave and post feminism period at global level. During the period of 1960s- to 80s, women empowerment notion became popular in the sphere of development and capacity building. The Liberal, Radical, Marxian, Socialistic, Postmodern, Existential feminism have influenced the women's movement and women empowerment in global sphere. Besides the influence of feminist political ideologies and phases of women's movement, the United Nations (UN) Organized international conferences like first conference held at Mexico (1975), second conference held at Copenhagen (1980), the third conference held at Nairobi (1985) and the fourth conference held at Beijing (1995). These conferences focused on the gender development in general and women development in particular. The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW-1979) was another effort at the international level for women empowerment. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was another initiative at the global level for strengthening women's development across the globe. The Sustainable Development Goal (2015) took place after MDGs with focus of seventeen (17) goals which are to be achieved by year 2030. Basically, these aspects relate to women's socio-economic empowerment. SDG commits all governments to take actions to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. The Women's Empowerment Principles (2010) establishes high level corporate leadership for gender equality. Its thrust area includes "treat all women and men

fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination, ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of all women and men workers, promote education and training”.

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