

A REALISTIC APPROACH ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Introduction:

Women empowerment in India is as challenging as the abolitions of terrorism from the world. From the beginning, Civilization shows its footprints on the sand of history that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced. And especially in India, it is incurable diseases. And the following phrase of Manusmriti, “ Na stree swathantryam Arjati” (Woman is undeserving for independence), reflects our whole attitude towards women in our country. Woman suffers discrimination and injustice in all stages of her life. Poverty, dependency, illiteracy and superstitious beliefs victimize thousands of women in the Indian society. The hardships caused by adverse environmental conditions and the weight of tradition aggravate their disadvantages. The government of India declared 2001 as ‘womens’s empowerment year’ on a vision, where men & women are same in every aspect of life. But what right of expression the women are having in our society, still remains a big question. Atrocities and discrimination are the two major problems, which the Indian women face in the present day society. The government of India has taken various welfare measures to present equal status to women in man oriented society. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution empowered women to represent in the Panchayati raj system and urban local bodies as a sign of political empowerment. According to world economic survey this year, placed India ahead of many western countries in terms of women’s political empowerment. Throughout history and in many societies including India, gender inequality was part and parcel of an accepted male dominated culture. Atrocities and discrimination are the two major problems, which the Indian women face in her present day society. The traditional mentalities of India assume that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. They have been considered as the sex object and inferior to the men in different spheres of knowledge. The ‘Sati Pratha’, ‘Pradah System’, ‘Child Marriage’, ‘dowry system’, etc. Have been some form of atrocities and discriminatory attitudes against the women. Even after 72 years of Indian independence, women are still one of the most powerless and marginalized sections of Indian society. Despite of all these measures, women in this country are mostly unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and backward tradition. And yet, millions of women are in darkness, and suffer from deprivation of minimum necessities of life.

Empowerment of any section of a society is a myth until they are conferred equality before law. The foundation of freedom, justice and fraternity is based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights to all the members of the society. The universal declaration of human right adopted and proclaimed by the general assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948, envisaged in article 2 that “Everyone is entitled to all the right and freedoms set forth in this declarations without distinction of any kind.” Further, it also recognized that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of the society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.” It has traditionally been accepted that the thread of family weaves the fabric of Indian society. Women are considered as the hub centre of the family. Still, in the era of political domination by foreigners, the women in India suffered most. A few social reform measures were taken towards the later 19th and early 20th century during the British regime.

What is women empowerment?

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of women. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- ❖ Having decision-making power of their own.
- ❖ Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision.
- ❖ Having a range of options from which you can make choices.
- ❖ Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- ❖ Having positive thinking on the ability to make change.
- ❖ Ability to learn skills for improving one’s personal or group powers.
- ❖ Ability to change others perceptions by democratic mean.
- ❖ Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self- initiate.

- ❖ Increasing one's positive self – image and overcoming stigma.

Constitutional Provisions

The makers of the constitution of India tried to ensure Liberty, Equality and Dignity of all the citizens of India. To ensure this equality, the Indian constitution eliminated almost all discrimination based on Caste, Creed, Sex and Religion. It accepted in principle the equality of men and women. The article 14 confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 14 empowered the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Similarly, article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in the matter of public towards providing men and women equally the right to means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work; article 42 directs the state to make provisions for ensuring just and human condition of work and maternity relief; and article 51(A) (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. To make this de-jure equality into a de- facto one, many policies and programmes were put into action from time to time, besides enacting / enforcing special legislation, in favour of women.

Legislative measures:

Various legislative measures were designed to reinforce the provisions enshrined in the constitution. The government of India had enacted both women specific and women related legislations to safeguard the rights and interests of women, besides protecting against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of sati etc. The government has enacted 41 legislations having direct.

Approach of the Indian judiciary on women issues:

The laws enacted by the government of India have direct and indirect bearing on the status of women. Since the enactment of the laws women have been approaching the judiciary to safeguard their rights and interests. They have been seeking justice against social discrimination, violence, rape, dowry, sexual harassment of working women at work places and immoral trafficking etc. Indian judiciary has been very sensitive to women and women related issues. It has showed great interest in discharging cases concerning women. The apex court of India took special interest in discharging its legal and constitutional obligations and safeguarding the interests of women in changing situation and societal demands. The judgment proclaimed by the judiciary show that its attitude towards women related issues is very impressive and progressive in nature. This has direct and indirect bearing on the society and its environment. People in general and women in particular are becoming more and more aware of their rights and probable redress through judiciary. They are approaching courts in greater number to get justice and to safeguard their human and constitutional rights. The old stigma and fear of being looked down upon by the society has been hammered by the judgments of the hon'ble courts. The reporting of judgments and debate on important cases has strengthened the confidence of women in judiciary. Recently women are empowered with the act of Nirbhaya Act and domestic violence against women.

Human rights and empowerment of women:

The reason that we emphasize "Women's Right " within human rights goes beyond history. Traditionally, women have not enjoyed equal access to basic human rights, protections, resources, and services. Unfortunately, gender inequality is still present in every society and remains as a huge barrier for the world. Unequal situations for women vary significantly by Region, Country, Culture, Society, Community etc. Also, there are various conditions and places where women are disadvantaged. The origin of the discrimination is sometimes religion, beliefs, cultural traditions or political interests. These excuses in some occasions encourage the unequal and discriminatory treatment of women, thus creating oppressed communities. Moreover, women's categorization according to their race, sexual orientation, disabilities, economics status and some other factors triggers more and more discriminative actions in societies.

Gender equity and women empowerment:

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights issues that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the millennium development goals. Despite much progress in bringing women out of poverty, six out of ten of world's poorest people are still women. Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line, are often in situations of extreme poverty, and experience harsh intra- household and social discrimination, poverty eradication programmes must specifically address their needs and problems. Problems include: women being more tied to the home with young children; limited awareness of and participation in self- employment activities; limited access to appropriate resources; absence of tailored support systems and programmes; and lack of expression of their needs and demands in addressing their income enhancing opportunities. These factors combined with a low economic conditions and the standard of living result in a precarious situation that limits their capacity to improve the quality of their lives through their own income. Total literacy campaigns have provided illiterate adult women, who have been denied access to formal schooling, with a great opportunity for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Literacy campaigns have thus actively promoted gender equity and have sought to empower them as to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities. The impact of literacy on women's life has often been dramatic. Experiences of Paddukuttai in tamil nadu (where women learnt how to bicycle and acquired ownership right in stone quarries) and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh inspired women to launch anti – arrack agitation have shown how women have been empowered at individual and collective levels as a result of their participation.

Impediments to empowerment of women:

- ❖ Female infants are often denied the same food, education and medical care as boys. As a result they suffer from malnutrition, poor health and lack of education.
- ❖ Many poor families, who can't afford to pay dowry to their daughters, choose to murder their female infants as the dowry is a symbol of status in the society.
- ❖ Domestic violence is common and a serious problem.

- ❖ In remote villages, witchcraft accusations and punishments still occur.
- ❖ Sexual harassment and discrimination at the workplace is common.
- ❖ Early marriages also contribute miserably to their hard life.

Conclusion:

Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.” In a globalizing world, gender equality and empowerments of women are vital tools- to achieve sustainable developments of societies, and are even admitted by the fools! Still, the violence towards women is an epidemic against which no country is immune- and today, we face the greater challenges of human rights and non- melodious tune! In the arena of politics, the poor are excluded from governance, regardless of the gender – and women are victims of other peoples decisions cause they are assumed to be tender! So the entire spectrum of women’s roles to combat poverty, hunger, and disease – need to be re- examined under the new millennium lights before the roles deacease! Impacts of modern conflicts now affect the global women and girls without a doubt- but they’re neither initiators nor prosecutors of conflicts, or matching game of shout! Determined efforts must be taken to end the impunity surrounding this lamentable claw – and the perpetrators must be brought to justice, and told that they are not above the law! So my suggestions are we have to accept the fact that things are not going to change overnight but because of this we cannot stop taking actions either. At this juncture the most important step is to initiate ground level actions however small it might seem. Women should be encouraged to bring their vision and leadership, knowledge and skills, views and aspirations into the dev elopement agenda from the grassroots to international levels. Science and technology brings economic growth and well – being to people and it is not only the empowerment of women through science and technology, but also the enrichment of science and technology through women’s participation.

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