EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SHGs

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Introduction:

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea-change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. It has been understood as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. Empowerment particularly includes control over resources and ideology. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) it leads to a growing intrinsic capability- greater self confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasizes on two important aspects. Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals but not a power over others. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless- whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Though concept of empowerment is not specific to women, yet it is unique in that and it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households (Malhotra et al, 2002).

Empowerment of women in India The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd &74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that for reservation of seats(33%), whereas the report HRD as March2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweeden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Findland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India.

Various Government Policies and Schemes-.

The Government of India is running various welfare schemes and policies, both at State and Central levels for the empowerment of woman. Some of the major programs and measures include Swadhar (1995), Swayam Siddha (2001), Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP-2003), Sabla Scheme (2010), National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010) etc. All such policies and programs focus on social, economic and educational empowerment of women across various age groups.Thus, there has been no dearth of social, economic, political, legal and Constitutional efforts made for the empowerment of women both prior to and post-Independence. However, women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, dowry killings, acid attacks, human trafficking, etc. According to a global poll conducted by Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country in the world for women".

Types of Women Empowerment:

Social Women Empowerment: A critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Educational Women Empowerment: It means empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It means making women aware of their rights and developing a confidence to claim them.

Economic and occupational empowerment: It implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on their male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.

Legal Women Empowerment: It suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women empowerment. It means addressing the gaps between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs.

Political Women Empowerment: It means the existence of a political system favoring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance.

Characteristics of women empowerment

1 .Women   empowerment is giving power to women. It is making women better off. It enables a greater degree of self-confidence and sense of independence among women.

2. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand their rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way. It gives the capacity or power to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society.

3. Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves increase their self-reliance and it provides greater autonomy.

4. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets intellectual resources and ideology. It challenges traditional power equations and relations.

5. Women empowerment abolishes all gender base discrimination in all institutions and structures of society. It ensures participation of women in policy and decision-making the process at domestic and public levels.

6. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive powers of existing gender social relations.

7. Women empowerment makes women more powerful to face the challenges of life, to overcome to the disabilities, handicaps, and inequalities. It enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

8. Empowerment also means equal status to women. It provides greater access to knowledge and resources greater autonomy in decision making greater ability to plan their and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

9. Women empowerment occurs within sociology, psychological, political cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community.

10. Women empowerment is an ongoing dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structure and ideologies that keep them subordinate. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

The promotional schemes available in the country in order to develop women entrepreneurship are as follows.

1. MahilaNidhi.

2. MahilavikasNidhi

3. Priyadarshiniyojana .

4. Trade-related entrepreneurship assistance and development (TREAD).

5. SIDO (small industries development organization)

6. CWEI (the consortium of women entrepreneurs of India).

7. WIT (women India trust).

8. SWEA (self-employed women association) .

9. SHG's (self-help group)

10. FTWE (federation of women entrepreneurs)

11. KVIC (khadi villages industries commission)

12. DIC (District industrial centres)

13. Women cell

These schemes can financially help the women but she has to take her own decision, Stepout motivate each other and let the stars work for you. And of course, our government is coming up with various schemes to make women socially and economically strong.

This is all about women empowerment a topic which really needs to be known to all the people out there. It is not about just handful but for the 586.47 million which is nearly48,5% of women in the country.

Empowerment through SHGs/MahilaMandals

Empowerment of women at micro-level is not possible until there is involvement and collective action by voluntary agencies and grassroots groups. The NGOs in Himachal Pradesh as elsewhere have adopted Self Help Group (SHG) model for empowerment and poverty alleviation.   The SHG approach that NGOs use offers a great potential for achieving

empowerment outcome. There are also programmes of assistance to women's groups like MahilaMandals for creating greater awareness among women

The main objectives of SHGs MahilaMandals :

1. To enable women to unleash their innate potential, individually and ability to work collectively.
2. To provide a forum for rural women to discuss their personal, family, social, economic as well as spiritual concerns.
3. To comprehensively address issues like social justice, poverty, health, education, environment, and local self governance through the empowerment of rural women.
4. To make self dependent and wise decision makers by increasing responsibility and prioritizing issues using collective thinking.
5. To make women move from insecurity and instability to security and stability.
6. To sensitize women to their local issues.
7. Integration of every village women with Mahila Mandal for herself development and to make her aware of her rights so that she will make positive contributions towards the development of her village.
8. Comprehensive development of the village through village women.
9. To examine avenues for women to stand on their own feet such as through self help groups for micro-credit and community based livelihood.

Activities done at the field under MahilaMandal Programme:

1. Regular monthly meetings.
2. Mobilization, networking with community groups especially YuvaMandals and Panchayat, to strengthen participation and interlinkages. Participation in YuvaMnadals and Panchayat meetings.
3. Addressing issues affecting women such as gender, social injustice, alcohol abuse awareness, female feticide, women's role in Panchayat, cleanliness drives, clean water sources, trees plantation, ensuring literacy and education.
4. Supporting other women and children in distress.
5. Spreading awareness through topical songs, rallies, puppet shows, films, plays and quiz programmes.
6. Providing space and conducting income generation activities, Balwadi and adult literacy classes.
7. Accessing help from different departments of the government, as required.

8. Conducting special meets and events for exchange programmes in the villages, for both men and women.

9. Participation in exchange programmes in villages to learn about successes in agriculture and agriculture allied fields such as dairy, bee keeping, fishery, sericulture,

Women Empowerment — Challenges

Perspective: The most widespread and dehumanizing discriminations against women are on the basis of the biased perspective. The discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls; hence, female infanticide is a common practice inIndia. The ordeal that an Indian girl faces at birth is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle to be seen and heard.

Patriarchal Bottlenecks: The traditional Indian society is a patriarchal society ruled by the dictates of self-proclaimed caste lords who are the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. They put the burden of traditions, culture, and honor on the shoulders of women and mar their growth. The incidences of "honor-killing" reveal the distorted social fibre in the male-dominated society.

Economic Backwardness: Women constitute only 29% of the workforce but forms majorityof the destitute in the country. There has been a failure in transforming the available womenbase into human resource. This, in turn, has hampered not only the economic development of women but also of the country' as a whole.

Implementation Gaps: Through all these years, the attention is only on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes and have paid less attention to the proper monitoring system and implementation short-sightedness, for e.g. despite the presence of ThePre-Natal Diagnostic Technologies Act and various health programmes like JananiSurakshaYojana and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), our country has a skewed sex ratio and a high maternal mortality rate (MMR).

Loopholes in the legal structure: Although there are a number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence yet there has been the significant increase in the episodes of rapes, extortions, acid, attacks etc. This is due to delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of a judicial system.

Lack of Political Will: The still- pending Women's Reservation Bill underscores the lack of political will to empower women politically. The male dominance prevails in the politics of India and women are forced to remain mute spectators.

Way ahead: starts with bridging the deep-rooted biases through sustained reconditioning. It is only possible by promoting the idea of gender equality and uprooting social ideology of male child preferability. This concept of equality should be first developed in each and every household and from there; it should be taken to the society. This can be achieved by running sustained awareness programs with the help of dramas, radio, television, Internet, etc. Across the country.

Replacing 'Patriarchy': with Parity: A strong patriarchate society with deep- rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect women's empowerment. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there is no place for superiority. The Government should identify and eliminate such forces that work to keep alive the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart by issuing inhumane and unlawful dictates.

Education is the most important and indispensable tool for women empowerment. It makes women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Educational achievements of a woman can have ripple effects for the family and across generations. Most of the girls drop out of schools due to the unavailability of separate toilets for them. The recently launched 'Swachh Bharat Mission' focusing on improving sanitation facilities in schools and every rural household by 2019, can prove to be very significant in bringing down the rate of girls dropping out of school.

Political Will: Women should have access to resources, rights, and entitlements. They should be given decision-making powers and due position in governance. Thus, the Women Reservation Bill should be passed as soon as possible to increase the effective participation of women in the politics of India.

Bridging implementation gaps: Government or community-based bodies must be set up to monitor the programs devised for the welfare of the society. Due importance should be given for their proper implementation and their monitoring and evaluation through social audits.

Justice delayed is justice denied. Efforts should be made to restructure the legal process to deliver fair and in- time justice to the victims of heinous crimes like rapes, acid attacks,sexual harassment, trafficking and domestic violence. The idea of fast-track courts, devised to impart speedy justice to the victims of rapes and other crimes against women, is a good initiative taken by the judiciary and the Government of India.

Conclusion:

Empowering women socially, economically, educationally politically and legally is going to be a Herculean task. It is not going to be easy to change the culture of disregard for women which

are so deep-rooted in Indian society. But it does not mean that it is implausible. Only revolutions bring changes in a day, but reforms take their time. This one, in particular, will take its time as well. The idea of women empowerment might sound hard by the yard, but by the inch, it is just a clinch. All we need is a concentrated effort focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil.

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