

Transforming Reality of Women Empowerment

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Abstract : Today, in contrast to the past centuries, we find women literate, educated and liberated to lead. As we look back at the past centuries, we find many dark ages where women in different lands were suppressed, treated as commodities, with no voice in decision-making and no role in deciding how social and community life evolved. But the change has come about not without its struggles and sacrifices, protests, resentments, denials and conflicts. Women have come to celebrate their differences from men not as a reason for subjugation, but as a joyous gift of God to give an active support and contribution to the family first, to the work place next and the community at large in a broader sphere. The present paper explores the journey of women towards emancipation.

Index Terms – Empowerment, domesticity, seclusion, subjection, transforming, reality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, in contrast to the past centuries, we find women literate, educated and liberated to lead. Empowerment is about being given authority and power to do something. Empowerment is about becoming stronger and confident. Empowerment again means to become aware of one's rights and privileges. Empowerment also means the ability to control one's life in a more meaningful and fulfilling way.

As we look back at the past centuries, we find many dark ages where women in different lands were suppressed, treated as commodities, with no voice in decision-making and no role in deciding how social and community life evolved. Jasbir Jain says in her book *Indigenous Roots of Feminism*(2011) "Women were perceived as a historic, as outside time, and rendered silent and invisible. They were excluded from public domain through domesticity, seclusion and subordination." (p.219). But the change has come about not without its struggles and sacrifices, protests, resentments, denials and conflicts. This transforming journey of women passed through many difficulties and hurdles because those led with a vision to emancipate women were often viewed with suspicion from within the ranks of women themselves and opposed by the male-dominated hierarchies. Till today there is not complete gender equality in the world. But change has initiated. From powerlessness, women have come to recognize that there are individuals made in God's image and likeness just like men; and our valuable and precious in God's eyes. They have come to celebrate their differences from men not as a reason for subjugation, but as a joyous gift of God to give an active support and contribution to the family first, to the work place next and the community at large in a broader sphere. In all these areas women have risen to greatness and power by utilizing available resources and increasing their influence in the decision-making process. The key to this change has been literacy and education. In Oriya, Abanti Rao spoke at a conference on the reform of women's education. "Women experience a feeling of incompleteness, a sense of non-fulfillment at home, in society and the nation, and proceed on the path of reform The ignorant does not understand the limits of her knowledge. Therefore, it is clear that knowledge alone propels us along the path of reform. We must first understand this truth." (p.g.42). Economic freedom came through women finding employment in different spheres like nursing, teaching, managers and the like. Today women have made their presence felt in the field of police, defence, sports, space exploration, research and development, social work and many other fields.

Women gained political empowerment when thirty three percent reservation for them was implemented in the Indian Parliament. This led to the voice of women being heard loud and clear in the central hall of the world's largest democracy. Young girls are motivated by examples of the vision of pioneering ladies whose empowerment was a mile stone. Florence Nightingale made nursing into a structured and noble profession. Ida Scudder who in response to witnessing three tragic deaths of women in child birth in Tindivanam in a single night in the late 1980s responded to the challenge and heard God's call to become a missionary doctor and established the reputed Christian Medical College(CMC Vellore, first started for women), Amy Carmichael who dyed her skin with dark coffee to make her skin brown to gain access to an acceptance with young girl children and rescued hundreds of them from a life of forced prostitution in Dohnavur, Pandita Ramabai, a scholar in Sanskrit who saved the lives of thousands of women in famine struck times through her Mukti Mission in Pune. Today's need is to have women with such vision and responsibility for the upliftment of their comrades. Among the countless examples of empowered women in modern times is that of Malala Yousafzai. Her courage and words inspire and emphasize the importance of education as a means of women empowerment. Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Patel, Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi, Kalpana Chawla, Indira Nooyi, Kiran Bedi, Arundhati Bhattacharya, Bachendri Pal, etc are the numerous other examples. These women have learned to lead, have challenged existing norms of society and have taken a proactive role in changing traditions and rewriting history.

But it is sad that there is still needs to be a radical change in the way women are viewed in society. A woman gets educated, earns a well-paid job and then suddenly finds herself being bargained for in the marriage market. This is sad and tragic. In this world of commercialization, women are regarded as liabilities rather than as assets. This has to change if women empowerment has to become a reality in the fullest sense. Top leadership is something that women can aspire and reach to. But massive change in the mental makeup of the society for empowering her has to begin and be sustained at the grass root level. Assurance of employment, maintenance of good physical and emotional health should also be the priorities as far as women are concerned. One of women's active presence is seen in the social media. Several feminine needs and priorities have been brought to the limelight through intense campaigning through the social media. This is powerfully used to promote a cause, share a story, change public perception and even prevent negative stereotyping of women. The second area of women empowerment in the twenty-first century is the need to have a massive drive for bringing school and college girls into sports, games and outdoor activities. This coming together will not only help

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teenagers gain self confidence and esteem, but also increase their physical and emotional health. Is it enough? Is there more work to be done? No doubt there are many places where the voice of the women is still not heard. Discrimination still exists and even in the corporate world we talk about the glass ceiling. The media sensationalizes crime against women which is growing alarmingly. Domestic violence, dowry, gender discrimination continues to be the evils of our society. The dignity of women and their worth as individuals is often tainted by wrong portrayals in advertisements, movies and even in beauty pageants. But there is hope and light at the end of the tunnel. The voice of women will still be heard loud and clear in spite of attempts to silence them. More stories of women empowerment are being scripted in every village and city not only in one state and nation but across the boundaries. Jasbir Jain says, "They use art as a weapon against their adversaries. Writing, like all forms of resistance requires boldness and fearlessness."(p.213). It can very well be the transforming reality of the present.

REFERENCES

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