

Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract:--

Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But during post Vedic and Epic ages, they had faced some difficulties. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early 20th century there is status have been changed to slowly and gradually. After then independence of India, the constitutional makers, the national leaders are strongly demanded to give equal rights to women with men. Today we find that the women occupied the respectable positions in all the fields. Along with these opportunities they are not free from some discrimination and harassment of the society. Only a few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore each and every should be careful to promote the women status.

Introduction:--

In India women's empowerment is dependent on many different variables that include geographical location, (urban/rural) social status, (caste/ class) educational status and age. The existence of many policies on women's empowerment at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors including education, health, economic opportunities and gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. One Key factor for the gap in implementation of laws and policies .(1) To address discrimination economic disadvantages and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the household in much of India. As such women and girls have restricted mobility access to health facilities, access to education, lower decision making power and experience higher rates of violence. The participation of women in political is also hindered at the panchayat (local governing bodies) level and at the state and national levels despite existing reservations for women. (2)

The impact of the patriarchal structure can be seen in rural and urban India. All the women's empowerment is much less visible in rural areas than in urban areas. Social divisions among urban women leave an impact on empowerment of women. Upper class and educated women have better access to health, education and economic opportunities. Where as lower class and less educated women in urban areas enjoy these rights significantly less.

As a result of a vibrant women's Movement in the last fifty years, policies to advance human rights for women in India are substantial and forward-thinking such as Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the 73 and 74 amendments to the constitution that provide reservations for women to enter politics at Panchayat level. There are multiple National and state level governmental and non-governmental mechanism such as the women's Commission to advance local Non governmental organisations. In India the policy/ practice gap cuts across all sectors and initiatives which have result of rampant corruption and lack of good governance practices. State level governments claim a lack of resources and the resources they do receive are highly suspect able to corruption. Financial corruption hinders the government's ability to invest social capital and in this there is include initiative to advance women's empowerment. Since the 1990 India has put in place processes and legislative acts such as the Right to Information act (2005) for information disclosure to increase transparency and hold government official accountable. The mistress of leaders and political institutions remains high in society with corruption and craft allegations of uncovering media headlines.(3).

For empowerment of women in India there is requirement of cross cutting approach and one thing which addresses the diversity of social structures that govern women's lives. In India, identity politics is a very critical political instrument which is both used and abused throughout political and social institutions. There are a number of social movements fighting for the marginalized such as the tribal rights movement, dalit rights movements etc. This movement have achieved many gains. Women's rights within these movements are largely an articulated rein force inequalities with in the very structures from which they are demanding inclusion. Empowerment approaches for women is not only to

provide services, but also to recognise their lived realities of multiple layers of discrimination that hinder their access to services.

Women's Rights and Security in India:--

Women's Rights:--

The Government of India has two main bodies to advance gender equality : The ministry of women and child development and the National Commission for Women. Which is an autonomous organisation under the ministry of women and child development.(4) These both bodies work on national and state level. These both bodies also work on legal and social policies to advance and gender equality. The local level microfinance schemes to advance economic opportunities for rural women as widely implemented by the Ministry. The National Commission for Women work is like an instrument in creating legislative changes and had setup complaint and investigate cells at the state level. The complaints of gender-based violence are received by the grievance cells and are mandated to investigate provide reference and counselling and ultimately report on such cases.(5).

There are continuous demands for better laws, provisions and accountability for implementation with the vibrant women's rights Movement in India. Most recent example include the change in India's rape laws where in 2006 marital rape was recognised. In sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code, the women's rights activist are demanding better provisions. since then there have been multiple challenges by the women's movement leading to small but significant amendments.(6) The 2005 domestic violence act provides protection from violence in the household from not only man preparators but also female preparators like mother-in-law and other female members.

Inequality between men and women runs across the board. In this include education, economic opportunities , representation in governance and other state and private institutions. Additionally , women in India face higher rates of violence. Some recent statistics on women can be included:--

1. 85% husband's don't allow to be independent of women even the woman is educated because these husbands have no education and they don't allow them to do job.
2. India ranks 18th among the highest maternal mortality rates in the world with 540 deaths for every 100000 births.(7)
3. Only 48% of adult Indian women are literate.(8)
4. 36.1 % have experience to Physical violence in their adult lives among rural women.(9).
5. 66% of women who have experienced physical violence in their life time divorced without for deserted.(10)
6. 85.3 % of women only reporting violence claimed that their husbands were the perpetrators.(11)
7. Only 43% of currently married women between ages (15 to 49) are employed as compared to 99% of men, according to the most recent demographic and health survey analysis.(12)
8. Lower caste and tribal women are mostly who are experience to the highest levels of violence.

Women's Security:--

The multiple forms of violence experienced in the household at the community level threaten women's security in India. Son preference has direct linkage to sex selective abortion. According to research by the international centre for research on women (ICRW) found that in households where there is more than one daughter there are significant difference in nutrition and health between male and female children.(13) In urban India women and girls are at high risk of gender based violence. In Delhi the capital of country scan of daily newspaper reveals shocking numbers of cases of violence against women. The national crime Bureau claims that a women is raped every 29 minutes in Delhi. Women and girls are not safe in urban areas who are increasingly moving away from rural area in search of economic opportunities or to get higher education. Particularly women and girls from the North East reason who are living in Delhi have reported social discrimination and marginalization and many times physical violence. In 2005 according to

the North East Support Centre among 100,000 people living in Delhi from the North East 86% had reported social discrimination and 41% of cases were sexual abuse cases.(14).

Trafficking of Women And Girls:--

India is both a source of destination for trafficked women and girls into prostitution and bonded labour. While it is difficult to ascertain an exact number of traffic the women and girls. There have been figures project by various National and international NGOs.(15) The immoral traffic prevention act 1956 (ITPA) it is the widely used law to prosecute traffickers but also is involved to target prostitution.

Women's Economic Opportunities in India:--

India is one of the world's fastest growing economies with women mainly from the middle class who are increasingly entering the workforce. Urban centres like Delhi and Bangalore have seen an influx of young women from rural and semi-urban part of country. Who are living alone and while defining themselves. (16)

However the story of economic empowerment for women is not a singular narrative but it is located and complex set of caste, class, religious and ethnic identities.

In 2009, the Global gender gap report by the world economic Forum, the rank of India is 114th out of 134 countries for in equality between men and women in the economy, health, politics and education.(17) The rank of India is 127th and 122nd on equal economic opportunities and women participation in the labour force.(18) The number of women in the workforce varies from state to state : 21% in Delhi, 23% in Punjab, 65% in Manipur, 71% in Chhattisgarh and 76% in Arunachal Pradesh.(19) The diversity of women's economic opportunity is between States due to the cultural religious and ethnic diversity of each state.

Rural women, particularly from lower caste have the lowest literacy rates and therefore do not have capacity to pay for contracts. They are most often engage in small scale industry. Self help groups (SHGs) are widely practiced model for social and economic mobility by NGOs and the government. SHGs provide loans two women that can be used for varying needs. SHGs are also used to promote a change in community at the large. The members of SHGs have used their experiences as leverage to enter other local institution such as the panchayat Khap.(20)

Women are also very visible in the construction sector in India. They work like domestic workers on daily wages women. Construction workers are mostly poor illiterate and have little negotiating power. This sector is highly vulnerable to exploitation. The payment is given less to women than men. The women worker do back-breaking work like carrying bricks and other heavy materials on site. (21)

While India has one of the highest percentage of professional women in the world. Those who occupy managerial positions are under 3% (22). Most women work in low administrative positions. Many women migrating to Urban centres. Mostly work in service and retail industries and more and more women entering in IT sectors.(23)

women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights:--

The movement to assure women's economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) as basic Human Rights is just emerging in India. ESCR attempts to look at the broader issues facing women namely poverty, housing, education and employment, food security , trade etc. While the Human Rights movement on ESCR is contained at the international levels. There are emerging social movements around the world. In the Indian context projects like the programme on women's economic, social and cultural rights (PWESCR). For example this is creating a linkage between the international Human Rights Movement and the local articulation of women's rights. The aim of PWESCR is to build a women's rights Movement in India that creates equality in all spheres of women's lives. By empowering women economically and socially , ESCR provides for a broader discourse on rights that move women's rights from a victim centred approach to one that cuts across other fundamental Human Rights issues.

Women in Politics in India:--

Historical Context :--

During the Independence movement women were visible and active as Nationalists and as symbols of "Mother India". Particularly Gandhiji was instrumental in creating a space for women through his non-violence mode of protest. (24). Gandhi's legendary Salt March (25), did not include women. But due to demands from women Nationalists, he later realised the power of women organizers at local level. Gandhiji included the women in the Nationalist movement to debunk the British colonial assertion of needing to save the poor and vulnerable women of Pre independence India.

In India women took part in men in National system movements, in turn propelling a women's rights movement. Women revolutionaries gave way to their male counterparts who created a strong male and Hindu "New India". The first post independence Lok Sabha the People's Council for the Parliament had 4.4% women. (26). The period between the early 1940 and late 1970 and emergence of the Indian women's movement but still 1980 is the women's movement gained real momentum.

Reservation At The Panchayat Level :--

A committee on the status of women in India was established in 1976. It has published a report about the reservation of Women in 1988, that there is 33.3% reservation for women at the panchayat level. It was only in 1993 that an amendment in the constitution made the proposed reservation at the panchayat (village level governing Councils) a reality. (27)

A study by the accountability initiative also states that in panchayats with female presidents the participation of women in the larger Council rose close to 3% in a year. (28) The reason for the increase of women participation is co-related to two possible factors: First women representative exemplified new possibilities for change. and second women leaders took up issues that would have a positive impact on whole community.

Caste and Class Politics:--

India is one of the few countries in the world that has elected women leader. for women class, caste and age all have significant impact in their lives. During her time Indira Gandhi was among the very few women leaders in the world. However as a prime minister her role was not seen as a win for the women's Movement in India. She was the daughter of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and she represented the political dynasty of her family. During the declared period of emergency (1975 to 1977) her controversial political moves suppressed dissent for saying many of the radical women's rights movements to go underground. (29) In 2007, India elected its first female President Mrs Pratibha Patil. While the president holds a mostly ceremonial role in Indian politics. Mrs Pratibha Patil's election was deemed a symbol move towards a more equitable representative of women at the highest levels of government.

33% Reservation For Women:--

In April 2010, the women bill was passed, which gives 33% reservation for women in all levels of Indian politics. This will take 14 years after its introduction to pass by Rajya Sabha (The Upper house of parliament). It is yet to be passed by Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Parliament.) The reservation bill will add 181 out of 543 seats at the Parliament level and 1,370 seats of the 4,109 seats at the state assembly level. (30) This is a history in the Indian political landscape as currently women occupy less than 10% of seats in National parliament. (31)

The reservation bill will also significantly change the demographic of class and caste among women politicians. It will create a path for women from lower classes and cast who are currently confined to the local level governance to enter state and national level governments. About the reservation for scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe, there is one third of SC and ST candidates must be women. Excluded other backward classes OBC. Because OBC is not included in this reservation, due to the wide disagreement about who constitutes OBC and a lack of existing data on the OBC population.

The bill mandates that all political parties reserve one third of the electoral ticket for women. This will in advertently create spaces for lower caste and class women to enter state and national level politics. The implementation of women's bill will impact of class caste and gender and one thing is clear that India's politics is moving closer to equitable inclusion than ever before.

References:--

- 1 Some key laws and policies include: Articles 14, 15, 16, 39(a), 39 (d), Domestic Violence Act (2005), Sati Prevention Act (1987), Dowry Prohibition Act and Rules (1985), the establishment of the Commission on the Status on Women, at the National and State levels.
- 2 Reservations for women exist at the Panchayat level and there is a movement to reserve 33% seats for women in all the political parties, and all levels of national and state level political structures.
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8. <http://www.unifem.org.in/PDF/Progress%20of%20Women%20in%20South%20Asia%202007.pdf> See
9. See <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FRIND3/15Chapter15.pdf>
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14. <http://thesop.org/story/world/2010/01/06/crime-against-northeastern-women.php>
15. See <http://nhrc.nic.in/Documents/ReportonTrafficking.pdf> (pg. 21---22) for data on trafficking collated from various sources
16. See http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/23/world/asia/23iht_india.1.8451014.html for a story of two young women living in Bangalore and negotiating their traditional responsibilities
17. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/India.pdf>

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19. <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FRIND3/14Chapter14.pdf>
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23. http://ub.uni-muenchen.de/4873/1/MPRA_paper_4873.pdf
24. <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/india/indian.pdf>
25. The salt march was a form of protest, lead by Gandhi through---out India to initiate the boycotting English made salt and to symbolize the move towards nationalizing India's commodities and hence Independence from the colonial rule.
26. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/newloksabhawillhavemostwomenmpsever/465283/>
27. Panchayats are local level councils, directly elected by the people. The council governs the village's social, political and economic issues.
28. <http://www.accountabilityindia.org/pdf/PanchayatBrief1.pdf>
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