

Empowerment of Women: Recent Trends and Challenges

Theme : Empowerment of Women: Views, Attitudes, Issues and Trends

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Abstract:

Any Nation's development, growth or civilization can be assessed, evaluated or judged by the position of women. Since women play a vital and significant role in the family upbringing in which she has to play a dual roles. At home she involves actively in daily chores and at the same time she has to contribute at her work place outside her House.

In olden days women are not given opportunity to exhibit their God given inner gifts, talents and skills. They were confined to family and its affairs and that too look after their husband, children, cook food, clean the house. But today it is not so. Women are educated and this education empowers them. They are involved in various activities like art and also they occupy position in social and political service.

Today still there is a kind of prejudice towards women, due to which there is a gender disparity, sexual exploitation and violence. Even in some places girls and women are deprived of food and basic education. Also Human rights are denied.

If she is well educated, she will also contribute to the Nation's economy. Today due to technological and scientific progress, women have new avenues. Both men and women are doing same jobs and are drawing equal salaries. Education gives them immense satisfaction, respect and dignity. Also gives them confidence and empowerment to give their best. They will shine like stars if they realize their self worth. May every family, society, Nation and world stand up for women who are the real contributors of the progress of the humanity. She is most beautiful creation of God.

Key words: Empowerment, Education, Values- Political, Social and Economic, Family, Employment and Occupation, Self worth, Dignity, Violence, Exploitation and Discrimination.

Introduction:

*"Give us good women: we will have a great civilization, Give us good mother ;
we will have a great Nation." - Dr. S. Radha Krishnan.*

Women play an important role in Nation's building. Their contribution is something unique and great which starts from the family sphere. She who nurtures the baby in the cradle, make great men/women in the nation. When we look at our country, we find two strong limitations and weaknesses for country's growth, one is lack of empowerment of women and exploitation of the poor. If women are empowered to act independently, it gives them power, courage and increases their self-esteem. Women on whole are back seated always and never enjoyed economic and social equalities. Though they have few rights and privileges it is only limited to few educated women, but large number of women specially who are illiterated and living in the villages are not able to access to their privileges.

Women's role is so vital in the family. The family, the society, the Nation can obtain lot of strength from her. She takes up a leading role in the family which in turn it has influence in the society. In highly progressive country like Japan, human capital is regarded as the real asset, particularly their women. This in turn enable the growth and development of the country; unfortunately most of the women spend their time and energy in domestic work, where as men are considered superior to women, who enjoy power, prestige, privileges and authority. Hence their discrimination affects the countries development.

In India, women constitute half of the segment of population. Today there is a realization among the women that they can be equal to men and women contribute equally for the growth of the Nation. The practice all over the world is that the women are designated as wives, mothers, sisters and homemakers. But today we see this trend is changing with the changing social – political and economic scenario throughout the World. So women play their role fearlessly with much confidence and courage.

Let us remember the father of our great Nation **Gandhiji's** saying “Confinement of women to routine households and that denial of opportunities for productive work and decision making would do irreparable damage to Nation.”

Our late Hon'ble President **A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** said “Empowering women is a pre – requisite for creating a good Nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and value systems lead. The development of good family, good society and ultimately good Nation.”

Empowerment of women requires development of women in terms of their status that is educational status, financial status, political status, occupational status etc.

Women Empowerment:

It was after the 1920s that the ruling elite started talking about the welfare of women and people's movement through participation in the freedom struggle. Gradually women started entering into the mainstream of politics and development. But this development is primarily

concentrated in raising their status and condition in society. Then during 1990s, it was realized that until or unless women play an effective role in decision – making and policy – making, their status cannot be improved. Thus the focus shifted from ‘welfare’ to ‘development’ and from ‘development’ to ‘empowerment’.

Women’s development is primarily socio – economic, while women’s empowerment is essentially political (S.L. Sharma, 1999). Clearly, a women’s empowerment perspective is different from a women’s development perspective in some very important ways. Empowerment mainly emphasizes gender equality.

Sharma (1999) considers conscientization as the key element to women’s empowerment. Conscientization implies acquisition of critical awareness about the structure of discrimination, exploitation and oppression in which one is placed. It has three aspects:

1. Awareness generation about gender gap among women;
2. Debunking of the belief that these gender gaps are God – given; and
3. Organization and mobilization of women to meet the end of gender equality.

Thus it is a awareness about discrimination that needs to be generated first, and then the organization and mobilization of women to fight against this discrimination, to get equality in all walks of life and hence empowerment. According to Usha Sharma (2003), there are seven major areas of discrimination against women in India:

- a. Malnutrition;
- b. Poor health;
- c. Lack of education;
- d. Overwork;
- e. Lack of skills;
- f. Mistreatment; and,
- g. Powerlessness.

In order to abolish this discrimination some of the indicators of empowerment of women could be:

- Enhanced political participation;
- Enhanced economic participation;
- Enhanced social participation;
- Eradication of all forms of violence against women;
- Enhanced concern about hygienic living;
- Enhanced cooperative attitude of males; and,
- Raising self – confidence.

Present Condition:

As our constitution guarantees the equality of women and has proclaimed equal status of women with man in every aspect, the status of the women is changing for the better.

Education:

Education plays a key role in the empowerment of women. It opens up vast avenues and opportunities for growth and also affects families and the future generation, because every child gets its first lesson from its mother. So education of women is very important and essential.

A National Committee on Women's Education has provided the following recommendations.

1. Priority should be given to women's education in the further programme of the development of education in the country.
2. Discrimination between the education as boys and girls should be curbed and both should expand on an equal footing.
3. The National Government should encourage stated to launch various programmes associated with the development of women's education.
4. Proper facilities and protection should be provided to women teachers serving in rural areas.

Besides the above recommendations of the various commissions and committees, several other schemes have been launched by the Central Government and State Government to meet the need of the educationally disadvantaged namely operation black Board (OB), District primary Education programme (DPEP), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS),. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Sarva Sikshya Abhijan (SSA), Mahila Vikas Samhaya Nigam (MVSN), Balika Samrudhi Yojana, etc. These and many such schemes adopted by the Government, empower women socially, economically and educationally.

Since independence, the promotion of women's enrolment to total enrolment has been rapidly increasing from 10% in 1950-51 to 39.84% in 2001-2002.

Some of the problems of women participation in higher Education.

- a. Entry women to higher education were over represented by Urban areas and hailing from affluent background. Researches proved that, higher the education and employment level of the parents, higher is the participation of women in higher education. However, the education of women is determined by the parental economic condition.
- b. Marriage poses another critical problem for women's participation in higher education, specifically among rural Indian women. Higher education of the girls, lower is the chance to get a suitable mate. It is thought so, because the groom invariably to be better educated than the bride and higher the level of education of the bridegroom, higher is the expectation in terms of dowry. In spite of the laws against dowry practice the stark reality

is transparent and this often makes parents unwilling to send their girls for higher education although they might have shown necessary aptitude and competence.

- c. Often it is witnessed that women students in colleges and Universities opt for light subjects such as music, home science and liberal arts rather than physics or environmental studies indicating a kind of sexual stereotyping in higher education in India their low participation in science and engineering due to the traditional practices between the sexes encourage boys to opt science and technical subjects and girls to opt for liberal subjects like arts.

It is true that there is an increasing trend towards women opting for administrative, management and computer examinations demonstrating a marked improvement in the choice of hard subjects, but the number is still small.

- The sex – role ideology directed by the traditional norm of patriarchy is another hindrance to the higher rate of women participation in higher education. Most of us think if a girl wants higher education to enhance her opportunities for a full – time career then family and children must be neglected for her. It is the general view of the common man that women education has no return value with respect to economic aspect of their family.

On the whole women are still behind men. Even though they have sufficient education they have less access to employment and independence in social economic and political spectrum.

Social Issues:

Both at home and in the work place, there have been radical shifts of thought regarding women. The traditional roles of wife and mother have been called into question. The gift of sexuality has been trivialized. Virginity is laughed at. The value of children and family has been radically challenged. Women today face crucial changes concerning the responsibility for human life. the most strident voices of the women’s movement demand that we look at the issues of abortion and birth control as issues of women’s rights. There is grave danger that we simply agree, and fail to see that issues of human life are issues for us all. The need for women in this reflection is of particular importance. The voice of women has helped us to understand the horror of violence and brutality in the victimization that is pornography. Within society the recurrent cry for justice has also influenced women’s perception of themselves and others’ perception of them. Freed now through of wife and mother, pressured by economic constraints and materialistic expectation, women have demanded more and more positions in the market place. Becoming more aware of their potential and talent they also demand justice in salary and job promotion. These issues of equal pay for equal work job promotion on the basis of talent and ability are right and just.

In the married life both husband and wife have to adjust with each other. It is woman is the one who takes initiation in adjustment. **Kapadia** in his book “the Marriage and Family in India” writes “ this concept of marriage, that is indispensable, is a lofty one because it means that the husband and wife, after marriage have to adjust their taste and tempers, their ideals and interests, instead of breaking with each other, when they find that these differ.” Today there is lot of change in the attitude of women towards marriage and marital relationship.

The traditional attitude that a wife is completely sub – ordinate to the husband and must look up to him as God, is more likely to fit in with a larger difference in age in former times than more equal age as is found today. If the age difference decreases and at the same time, women become more equally educated to men, then the traditional attitude between husband – wife is likely to break down into one of more equal authority and more companionship. This is what exactly happened in our middle class and cultured society

Kapur writes “Several demands are made by husband and wife each other these days and varied is the satisfactions desired and expected by each, from the other happiness or unhappiness in marriage today centers primarily around the husband – wife relationship. One of the important features of the process of modernization is not bringing about a total substitution of the traditional values by modern values; there is a struggle of both kinds of value to survive simultaneously. In such a situation, women are victims of conflicting expectations for profession and domestic sides. Since the researcher is interested only identifying the status factors, which contribute to or arise out of employment, he is not discussing other factors, like legislation, women’s welfare programmes of National Governments etc., which also have contributed to improve women’s status in the different societies.

In the fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in September 1995, it is said that the human rights of women include their right to have control over and to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality. Equal relationship between men and women is expected in all aspects including sex. (**B. Presser & Gita Sen, 2000**).

In most of the Indian society specially in rural areas, women have no voice, they have no freedom of speech or expression. There are two categories of rural women. Those belong to the upper caste family have lot of restrictions to work outside the houses. Women belonging to the lower caste, work outside their houses. But both work hard and make lot of scarifies.

Political Issues:

Independence brought women constitutional guarantees of justice, liberty, equality and dignity for the individual in the form of the fundamental rights and directive principles of the constitution.

Human development **report (2004)**. Views that the indicators of empowerment include access and rights to resources and economic opportunities and information (land, jobs, education, knowledge, health services etc) the division of labor and work load, access to services and institutions that supply them involvement in household decision making, political awareness and interest (voting decisions about voting and relative representation in public decision making bodies at community, state and National levels). In addition, intra household decision making receives importance among scholars as a commonly investigated indicator of women's empowerment (**Kabeer 2001**).

Psychological Issues:

Mostly women suffer in silence. India has shown utter disregard and disrespect for women. They are the victims of rape, sexual assault and harassment. Violence against women is a serious obstacle for growth, development and peace. It dehumanizes women and nullifies human rights and fundamental freedom.

Indian women continue to be at the receiving end. On 26 June, the Thomas Reuters Foundation released its finding on the status of women in 193 countries across the globe (<http://news.trust.org/item/201806121364519-cxz54/>). The findings stated that **'India most dangerous country for women with sexual violence rife.'** The release goes on to state that "experts said India moving to the top of poll showed not enough was being done to tackle the danger women faced, more than five years after the rape and murder of a student on a bus in Delhi made violence against women a national priority. India has shown utter disregard and disrespect for women... rape, marital rapes, sexual assault and harassment, female infanticide has gone unabated. The (world's) fastest growing economy and leader in space and technology is shamed for violence committed against women." This report also placed the country alongside Libya and Myanmar as also the "world's most dangerous countries for women exploited by human traffickers and forced to wed, work and sell sex".

The pink – coloured Economic Survey tabled in the Indian Parliament recently on 29th January, 2018 shows that in spite of all our progress, all is not well for girls and women in this country. The survey recommended that India must confront the societal preference for a son. Son preference in our society has led to an adverse sex ratio of females and males. As a result there are 63 million "missing" women in India. They are not missing in the sense that they can be found somewhere else. They are no more on this earth, but are put to death either by selective female feticide or female infanticide. Some of them die very young due to inadequate nutrition, primary health care and neglect. The term "missing" women was first coined by the noted economist, Amartya Sen. The purpose was to focus our attention to the prevailing unjust and evil

custom of sex selective abortions and female infanticide that continues to take place in our country.

Women in India go through psychological trauma. In India sexual and dowry harassments prevails in all the states. Also women are used for indecent advertisement and commercial purpose. Because of this the society gets corrupted and the innocent minds of children get defiled. Therefore the Government needs to protect women against exploitation in order to safe guard their dignity.

Conclusion:

Women can have a better place in the family and society, if she and her life- partner along with the other family members together, realize and work together, in collaboration. If there is regard, respect and esteem for are another, relationship gets strengthened with love and bond with truth. The Society needs a moral revolution. Today we need to understand this reality, accepting and celebrating individual personality and strive for joy and happiness which makes our life more beautiful and meaningful one.

In his letter he address the Fourth World Conference on Women his **Holiness Pope John Paul II** lauds and thanks women for their unique and precious role, for all that they represent in the life of humanity in the following beautiful, admirable and great manner:-

“Thank you, women who are mother! You have sheltered human beings within yourselves in a unique experience of joy and travail. This experience makes you become God’s own smile upon the newborn child, the one who guides your child’s first steps, who helps it to grow, and who is the anchor as the child makes its way along the journey of life.”

“Thank you, women who are wives! You irrevocably join your future to that of your husbands, in a relationship of mutual giving, at the service of love and life.”

“Thank you, women who are daughters and women who are sisters! Into the heart of the family, and then of all society, you bring the richness of your sensitivity, your intuitiveness, your generosity and fidelity.”

“Thank you, women who work! You are present and active in every areas of life – social, economic, cultural, artistic and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling, to a model of life ever open to the sense of “mystery”, to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.”

“Thank you, every woman, for the simple fact of being a woman! Through the insight which is so much a part of your womanhood you enrich the world’s understanding and help to make human relations more honest and authentic.”

Let every woman rise and thank God for creating her and making her a beautiful person, a precious gift of Him to humanity. Let her salute her fellow sisters with pride and march forward with courage, confidence, joy, happiness and empowerment. May our world find strength and grace in womanhood.

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