

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IS THE NEED OF THE DAY

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National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 admits that there is still exist, a wide gap between the enunciated goals and situational reality of status of women in India. The need for strengthening the legal system at elimination of all forms of discrimination has been emphasized time and again. The First Five Years plan viewed the issue of women and their development from the welfare points of view. The latter Plans took this issue with a strategy for their empowerment. But instead of broad frame work and perspectives this strategies are not translated into social, political, educational and cultural empowerment of women.¹

Status of women is the indicator to the progress of a society as well as of the country. Women could play an important role in the development of the society and the country. In that case education is the major force which can bring far reaching change to the society, as well as to the status of women. At the same time, in a representative democracy participation and representation of women in the decision making bodies is also vital for the empowerment of women. Education is considered as an important factor which could shape up not only the personality of an individual but also could develop the social set up of the community as a whole. The social set up of the community could be developed by imparting same type of education both for males and females. Women should be given free hand to impart all sorts of education for the fullest development of their personality.² Since women also constitute 50% of the total population of the society therefore they are also equally responsible for bringing social change.

Empowerment of women appears to be much publicized concept of 21st century through political participation. The politicians, the policy makers, the national leaders, the media and even international community talk about political empowerment of women. Yet women are nowhere near to bring full and equal opportunities in policy choices that affect their lives. The lack of opportunities for participation in the decision making bodies has far reaching consequences of Bodo women. It deprives women from their important rights and responsibilities as citizen, their view points and representatives trend to be remained unheard or under represented.

In the societies women had been considered naturally unsuited to political activity and had been formally or informally excluded from it. The legacy of this old belief, reinforced by unequal domestic division of labour not only handicapped women in the pursuit of political office but also prevents them from

being active in political participation of any type of nature. Bodo Women need protection of their rights and interests. Male alone should not make laws pertaining to the rights of women. According to J.S. Mills, women require more political right as they are more dependent on law for the protection of their rights and interests.³ Their active participation in law making is of vital importance as there are good reasons to be believed that issues affecting women are not taken seriously by men.

To give women their proper role in the society and to vest them with human rights and equality with men is nothing short of a major social revolution. Its origin can be traced in the minds of liberal thinkers' of the pre-independence era such as Raja Ram Mahan Roy, M.K. Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru etc. who gradually started the work of emancipation of women. But the urge still remains largely unfulfilled as she is searching for her place in the society. By simply observing colourful programme of "International Women's Days" every year on 8th March can not help in solving the problems of women folks in our country. It is only through her awareness and assertion of rights and privileges in various domains of social activity that can alone help her to attain the status of equality.

There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. As Swami Vivekananda said - "*It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing*". But through the centuries, societies of the world over have been trying to fly on one wing by denying women rightful place. The very concept of women empowerment shows that societies as such, have given a raw deal to women, who comprise nearly 50% of the population and women themselves had to come forward to fight for their rightful place in all walks of life and prevent their exploitation in every field.

The seed for development and social change should be implemented at the grassroots level i.e. in the curriculum in schools and colleges. Every school, college, and University ought to become an entry point of right to education. The right to education must be offered to all without discrimination as this gives everyone the benefit of education and an awareness of other rights to which they are entitled. Modern studies and researches have shown that women educated, healthy and enjoying elementary human rights are at the basis of the progress and prosperity of a society. Women's education has for example, a beneficially multiplier effect on social development and eventually on economic development. Kerala is an example of this development. Infantile mortality, population growth and average expectation of life in Kerala is equal to that of many developed countries.

National development will be more effective when citizens irrespective of being a man or women have an active Share in all its activities. Women are considered as most of the powerful resources for the development of any country. Women in developing countries face a double deprivation; overall human development achievement is low in these countries and women achievement is lower than that of men's. Despite the Constitution of India guarantees 'equality of status' to women, they do not enjoy full equality in the society. The majority population of women are illiterate, unpaid, deprived and disadvantaged.

Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Empowerment is the means as well as goals of self development. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowerment through five phases, viz. Welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control. It is a process whereby women can establish their control over various assets and which helps them to develop themselves confident. Women constitute almost 50% of human resources. Until and unless women resources are not properly exploit, society would continue to be deprived of its full development. Besides the existence of deep-rooted patriarchal social structure and traditional mind set of people, due to low self-esteem, lack of skill, lack of conceptual understanding etc., women fail to realise their potentiality. In this regard, education is the key tools to abolished evil practice from the society and to literate women from their ignorance and narrowness of thinking. Education helps women not only externally but also internally. It gives women confidence, liberty, identity, security etc.⁴

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control and to transformative action. Today women empowerment is considered as one of the prime issues for building of a nation all over the world. Empowering of women pre-supposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the perception of and expectation from women in our society. Women are the assets who can reshape and reconstruct the society in all aspects such as socially, economically, politically, and culturally etc. So women should be empowered with greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enables them to have greater ability to plan their lives or to have greater control over their circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by customs beliefs and practices. Empowering women is the need of the hour and has been deeply realized by all section of people in today's world. As we are aware of the fact that women constitute half of the total population of the country and the responsibility of making them more powerful and stronger also lies in the hands of conscious citizens of the country. The goal of attaining and strengthening Indian women empowerment must be accomplished through a well planed, well define and well organised efforts extended by every citizens of India. Empowerment is the expansion in people ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability previously denied to them. Women empowerment is closely associated with the nation building, since women is responsible for enriching healthy life and living to make it more meaningful and enjoyable therefore empowering them is very essential rather urgent need of the day.⁵

The term empowerment is widely used in the context of development particularly women's. It is way of overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment. It also means to strengthen women's positive outlook, confidence and values of an individual. Through which they can participate in all kinds of activities and able to co-operate with men folks in the field of social, economic, political, public administration, science and technology etc. Women need to be

empowered has been stressed times and again by socially and educationally enlightened groups of people by realizing the fact that women can play a very significant role in the development of human resources and in shaping the character of the nation's future generation.

Thus, empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which should enable women to realise their full identity and power in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shekels imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. Education is the only means of empowering women to protect their rights, to fight against exploitation and discrimination, and impart skills and self confidence. Besides the women movement and a wide spread network of non-governmental organisations which have strong grassroots presence and deep insight into women's concerns can also contribute in inspiring initiative for the empowerment of women. Gender equality and empowerment to women is recognised globally as an element to achieve progress in all areas. The Charter of the United Nations signed in 1945 is the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality was fundamental right. The principle of equality is also written in Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Right, Duties and Directives Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures for the upliftment of women folks. Though the Constitution of India guarantees equality to status to women but due to the illiterate they do not enjoyed full equality in the society. To highlight the importance of women education, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Education of a boy is education of one person but education of a girls is education to the whole family." Until and unless women are educated, they can not help in modernisation and development of the society.⁶ Thus, education is indispensable; the future prospects of women depend also on for economic, social and lethal changes being made that will promote the access of women to education.

Socially conscious and literate society has a vital role to play in democracy. Education helps the capacity to learn, read and use mathematics, to acquire information and to think critically about information. Women are a vital part of Indian economy, constituting one third of the national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of the family. Women are builders of the nation right from the early days in their homes and at their hand that the children received their first education. According to Gandhi, 'the home is the first university and parents – especially mothers are the first teacher'. Women as mothers take care of their family, advice and guide their children and mould the character and personality of men. They are not only teachers of children, performing all the domestic tasks but they also take part in various economic activities. In public life women are considered more competent and pragmatic than men. The empowered women may become agents of their own development and may be tool for economic change. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly says, "*To awaken the people, it is women, who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves*".

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