

Empowerment of Women: A Review Paper

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Introduction

Empowerment is a process that enables women to gain access to, and control of, material, intellectual and human resources and is the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. It is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through different problems in society. Many people think of women as physically and mentally inferior of men. It is often set-forth as an incontrovertible saying that men are socially superior because they are naturally supervisor. Male supremacy according to this myth is not a social phenomenon at a particular stage of history, but a natural law. Women's inferiority is the product of a social system which has fostered innumerable other inequalities, inferiorities, discriminations and degradation. But this social history has been concealed behind the myth that women are naturally inferior to men. Influenced by the myth that women have always been handicapped by their child-bearing functions, they tend to attribute the roots of oppression at least in part to biological sexual differences. In actuality, its causes are exclusively historical and social in character. A woman like any person occupies very many status positions at a given point of time and plays a number of roles, such as those in the kinship system, family system and the wider social system. Her status in society is usually not determined by anyone particular status position held by her but by her composite status which results from the merging of various statuses. The Indian Independence heralded the introduction of laws relating to women and

provided equality to men and women and also gave special protection to women to realize their interests effectively. Special laws were enacted to prevent indecent representation of women in the media and sexual harassment in workplaces. The law also has given women equal rights in the matter of adoption, maternity benefits, equal pay, good working conditions etc. At the international level, the United Nations (UN) Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sought to guarantee for better legal status to women. Although, gender discrimination has been banned by the Constitution and women have been guaranteed political equality with men. Political empowerment of women is part of the overall empowerment process. Political participation is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision-making process or increased decision-making power will lead to women's empowerment in the true sense of the term. In other words, increased decision-making power gives greater ability to influence matters that affect our lives in the community and the society at large but there is yet a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Even after half a century of independence, barring a few exceptions, women have mostly remained outside the domain of power and political authority. No doubt the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts have provided access to women in the decision-making process at the grass-root level but their representation in the parliament and state legislature are very poor. Insecurity does not allow the women leaders to identify leadership at the grass-root level. In reality, women representatives are affected by the caste and class divisions, feudal attitudes, patriarchal nature of the family and village-social, environment, ethnic, religious separatism and the like. They are members on record only. Allegedly, they are not consulted while making a decision. Thus, women representatives are not free from male dominance in the village administration and no significant change in the power equation is observed in the villages¹.

Women play major roles during various stages of their life as a daughter, sister, wife and mother etc. In spite of her contribution to human beings, she still belongs to a backward class on account of various social, political, economic and psychological barriers and impediments. On the one side, women are worshipped as a goddess in some religions and on the other side; she is oppressed, concealed, depressed, subjugated and persecuted by a male-dominated society. There is a serious dichotomy in our lives between our ideals and reality, which is particularly painful and

¹ For more information's site the link (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)

especially when it comes to the status of women in our country. Women still suffer from discrimination, exploitation and ill-treatment. The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality, liberty and self-respect to the women. The preamble promises to secure for all its citizens, justice-social, economic and political liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity, and to provide them all-fraternity, assuring the dignity of individual and the unity of Nation. The fundamental rights and directive principals of state policy are expected to take care of the implementation of justice, liberty and equality. Various legislation was passed to provide special protection to women and equal status to women. All such acts were passed with an aim to bring about social change.

Numerous studies on the empowerment of women in India have been done related to a variety of issues, (micro and macro). Main findings of these studies have been discussed in following pares:

Geraldine Forbes in '*The New Cambridge History of India: Women in modern India*' highlights the role of male reformers in the 19th century India for the upliftment of women from the traditional mindset. The researcher underlines the arguments of the Indian leaders of the 19th century that educating women is the best means of the emancipation of women. According to his findings, education helps so many women to understand their problems well. Understanding the problem is the first step for the solution (Forbes: Apr 6, 1998).

Murthy V. Krishna and Rao R.V.L.N. Ratnakara, in '*Political Empowerment of Women: Mile Stones and Challenges*' says that the freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and the value given by the society to the political role of women. The political empowerment of women is started with their participation in the freedom movement under the influence of Gandhi. After independence, the Constitutional provisions and amendments paved the way for the entry of women into the political arena especially at the level of local bodies. Women in Lok Sabha and Parliament, though not high, could create a space for them. However, any person with the right perspectives and attitudes will feel that women's representation in the Parliament and State Assemblies are not adequate in view of the size of their population (V.K. Murthy and Ratnakara Rao: 2011).

Ahmed Waseem et al in '*Women s Political Participation and Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Area of U.P*' revealed that during the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat election in 2000, Women have entered Panchayati Raj Institutions in large numbers. Women representation in Uttar Pradesh has shown a similar trend of being weak and

inefficient leaders at different places. There are instances where women have ended up becoming dummy candidates put up by her male relatives or other dominant people and at some places, they have proved their ability as a leader. It was seen where women have taken initiatives to evolve as an able leader, with the support of family, self-confidence and society were the major factors promoting her (Ahmed et al: 2008).

Akhilesh Kumar, in '*Women Empowerment: Nehruvian Thought and Action*' revealed that apart from liberalization, globalization and privatization, a social revolution and liberalization of minds toward greater gender equality has taken place. In sum, one must conjure up a vision of a society, which treats men and women equally in all matters. A step toward that goal would certainly take up toward newer heights in the process of nation-building (Akhilesh Kumar: 2003).

L. D Paliwala and R.D Bhagat, in '*Structures and strategies: Women Work and Family*', and '*Status of Women and Age at Marriage in India*' said that education and occupational opportunities are providing women with new roles outside the home, their social position in the family remains largely unchanged because the system of arranged marriage reasserts the authority of caste norms and the obligation of conformity to the traditional image of women as wife-mother with low ritual status. The emphasis on education was for equipping women to carry out their multiple roles as citizens, house-wives, mother, contributors to the family income and the builders of the new society (Leela Dube Paliwala, R.D. Bhagat: 1990).

Kumud Sharma & Vina Mazumdar in '*Women Studies: New Perception and the Challenges*' said that the issues relating to women's studies, raises important questions about the changes in perceptions and in academic research regarding women's contribution to society and their need in the context of modernization, development of social change. They mentioned three areas of a theoretical concept for understanding for women's situation, that, determinants of women's status as perceived by women themselves and by others, the link between family, sex roles, values and socialization process and women's perception of oppression and the need for change. (Kumud Sharma & Vina Mazumdar: 1979)

Conclusion

Empowerment can be defined in many ways, however, when talking about women's empowerment, empowerment means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it which puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and, in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making. Women's economic empowerment to the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from the resources, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well being. Economic empowerment increases women's agency, access to formal government programs, mobility outside the home, economic independence, and purchasing power. Political empowerment supports creating policies that would best support gender equality and agency for women in both the public and private spheres. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development. in order to empower the women in its real sense is important to first to change the mentality of not only of our society or of our men-folk but it is very important to first to change the mentality of women because until and unless the women will stand for her rights or against the violations of discriminations they is facing all over the world, they cannot get their complete rights with men. Many studies have found that empowerment definitions entail people having the capability to make important decisions in their lives while also being able to act on them. Lastly, empowerment and disempowerment is relative to others at a previous time; therefore, empowerment is a process, not a product.

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