

Sociological Dimensions of the issues of Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract

In ancient age, women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They did not have share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women, there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women. The present paper has been planned with a view to discuss the various issues related to the Empowerment of Women and to suggest measures for achieving this end. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the historical and sociological dimensions of the issue of Women Empowerment, to know the role of education in Women Empowerment.

Theoretical Orientation of the Problem

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure.

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in 1960. It has since then interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control and responsibility for one's life and situation, and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged group of people. At the former end of the continuum, where empowerment is defined largely as an individual process, empowerment can be used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security.

This Commitment was operationalised and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought,

conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations”.

Different Levels of Empowerment in line with most theorists on empowerment the one has to view empowerment as taking place on different levels and that change on all levels is necessary if the empowerment of women is really to occur. The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal.

The societal level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do, how women should behave etc.

The different levels are seen as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal level. Women who are empowered on an individual level will most likely go on and affect the other levels. Empowerment on a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of women in the form of increased self-esteem and sense of agency.

Objectives: - The present study has the following objectives-

1. To know the historical and sociological dimensions of the issues of women empowerment in India.
2. To know the role of education in women empowerment.

Methodology

As it is a qualitative study so the investigators have collected data from different secondary sources like research journals, various government organizations, books, websites etc.

History of Women Empowerment in India

History of Women Empowerment in India is quite confusing because on one side it encouraged women to choose their life partner on their own and on the other side, they were forced to perform sati as per social norm. Some reformatory movements by Guru Nanak, Jainism, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chander Vidyasagar and others did give some relief. After that Britishers took some steps to improve the condition of woman. Some laws were enacted, such as "Abolition of practice of sati; widow remarriage act 1856 etc. Due to injustice in ancient age, for many centuries, women didn't know what is freedom, liberation and independence. The stigma of women's slavery has crushed India's development. It has also impacted other parts of the world. Since women are half the population of the world,

they should have the equal opportunities to develop themselves as individuals and also a community.

After various new revolutions and social reform the modern era, the condition of women has started healing and women are now redefined by their strengths, skills and their abilities. Today, the women is a pilot, a doctor, an engineer, a politician, an artist, an another a leader, a president and much more; she is a home maker a complete administrator. It is the front of women struggle that we have got personalities like UprahwinFrey, Mother Teresa, JK Rowling, Benazir Bhutto, Malaya Yosufzar and Phoolan Devi. Moreover Women are joining the field of Science and Technology. In fact there is no sphere of activity in which women are unsuitable or incompetent.

“I measured the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have made”. This powerful statement was made by Dr. B. R Ambedker, Chairman of the institution drafting committee. He was the only Politician in history to resign from his post just because the parliament didn't Accept his 'Hindu Code Bill' which insisted of women issues and their solutions as a major part.

India will wait for the day when businesses in india will run under the names of “D'Souza and Daughters,” “kapoor and Daughters”, etc.

Social Empowerment

Social Empowerment means a more equitable social status for women in society because the primary responsibility of any human society is to ensure human dignity to all members. It is often argued that facilitating women's access to money is not an effective means for achieving women's empowerment unless it is linked to other kinds of activities like training on awareness of the impact of women's subordination, concept of self-esteem and on the meaning and benefits of empowering women. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that all interventions in favour of women must ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women and also ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at highest policy levels. For today's women, fewer things are in the category of 'not done', compared to the time of independence. One of the recommendations of the National Policy on Education–1986 is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered as a landmark in the approach to women education. It is often argued eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years by the year 1988. The universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadis and crèches, increasing the number of girls' hostel, women's polytechnics and multi-purpose institutions, non-formal adult education and, open and distance education programmes were some of the other steps taken to boost women's education leading to social empowerment.

Group or collective process always provide a support for empowerment as it exposes its members to local networks and this social interaction results in awareness about local realities which also helps them to overcome the barriers for accessing the resources.

Role of education in women empowerment

According to the Indian constitution, women are legal citizens of our country and have equal rights with men. Owing to the lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer tremendously. Women empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment, India is poised to becoming superpower, a developed country by 2020. Education increases the economic, social and political opportunities available to women. Education increases women's knowledge about controlling fertility and access to family planning services and often encourages them to delay the age at which they marry.

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development, policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the fifth five year plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in the status of women. The National Commission of women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at local level. In view of low literacy rate of women and the gigantic task of educating rural women a suitable strategy will have to be planned. Credit for consumption has been the hall mark of many projects that include micro finance. The National Mission for the Empowerment of Women (NMEW) has been launched by Government of India on International Women's Day on 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitating the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic developments programmes across ministries and departments. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body

servicing the National and State Mission Authority Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self – employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO’s contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

Promotion of equality between women & men and the empowerment of women is central to the work of United Nations. The UN actively promotes women’s human rights and works to eradicate, discourage of violence against women, including in armed conflict and through trafficking. There are various UN agencies working for the empowerment of women like The Commission on the Status of women, The Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, The Division for the advancement of women, The United Nations Development Fund for women, and recently, the UN Women association is formed which co-ordinates the activities of all the former UN agencies. These international agencies work to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society. So they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision- making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

Conclusion

The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self- decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality and such effort must started from home. The popular UNESCO slogan should be considered as an ideal for not only empowerment but also development of women: “Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family”.

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