



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: BRIEF DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century(national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. In this regard, we may mention the name of the British people. After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social position of women with men. Today we have seen the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some discrimination and harassment of the society. A few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, each and every should be careful to promote the women statuses. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. Household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. More than half of the women believe wife beating to be justified for one reason or the other. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age, education and with place of residence. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than that of urban women. A large gender gap exists in political participation too. The study concludes by an observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality.



KEYWORDS: Empowerment, Education, Gender, Women, Development, Media.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is the process of empowering women. Empowerment raises the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment equips and allows women to take life-determining decisions. They may get the opportunity to redefine gender roles, which in turn provide them more freedom to pursue desired goals.

Women are taken as secondary to men in their social role by many of the philosophers. "Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, and are not physically or mentally fit to participate in politics on equal terms with men" (Barro, p. 2).

Women empowerment is a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. Economic empowerment allows women in controlling and getting benefit from resources, assets and

incomes. It also grows ability to manage risks and improves well-being. It refers to women's ability to make strategic life choices which had been previously denied them. The worlds, Nations, businesses, communities and groups may benefit from women empowerment. It enhances the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development.

Definition: Empowerment is a “social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger societies” (Stein, 1997).

Empowerment means-

- ❖ having control, or gaining further control;
- ❖ having a say and being listened to;
- ❖ being able to define and create from a women’s perspective;
- ❖ being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women’s place)
- ❖ being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make (Griffen, 1987)

Empowerment is about positive changing and redistributing the balance of power in a given society, power being defined as control over resources and ideology. The resources may be categorized into physical, human, intellectual, financial, and self, including self-esteem, confidence, and creativity. Ideology refers to beliefs, values, attitudes, and ways of thinking and perceiving situations (S. Batliwala, 1993).

So, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action.

Theory of Women Empowerment

There are four waves of feminist movement. The first wave occurred in the 19th and early 20th century movement for women’s right to vote. The second wave in 1960s and 1970s, moved for equal legal and social rights. The third wave began in the 1990s, refers to a continuation and reaction to second-wave.

The fourth wave that began in 2012 and continues till now, talks about women empowerment. The fourth wave seeks greater gender equality by focusing on gendered norms and marginalization of women in society.

Traditionally, women are considered marginalized group especially women of colors and transgender women. Fourth-wave feminist’s advocate for greater representation of these groups in politics and business, and argue that society will be more equitable if policies and practices incorporated the perspectives of all people.

Fourth-wave of feminism argues for equal pay for equal work and the equal opportunities sought for girls and women and to overcome gender norms, for example expressing emotions and feelings freely, expressing themselves physically as they wish, and to be engaged parents to their children) and seek justice against assault and harassment is prominent.

Process of Women Empowerment

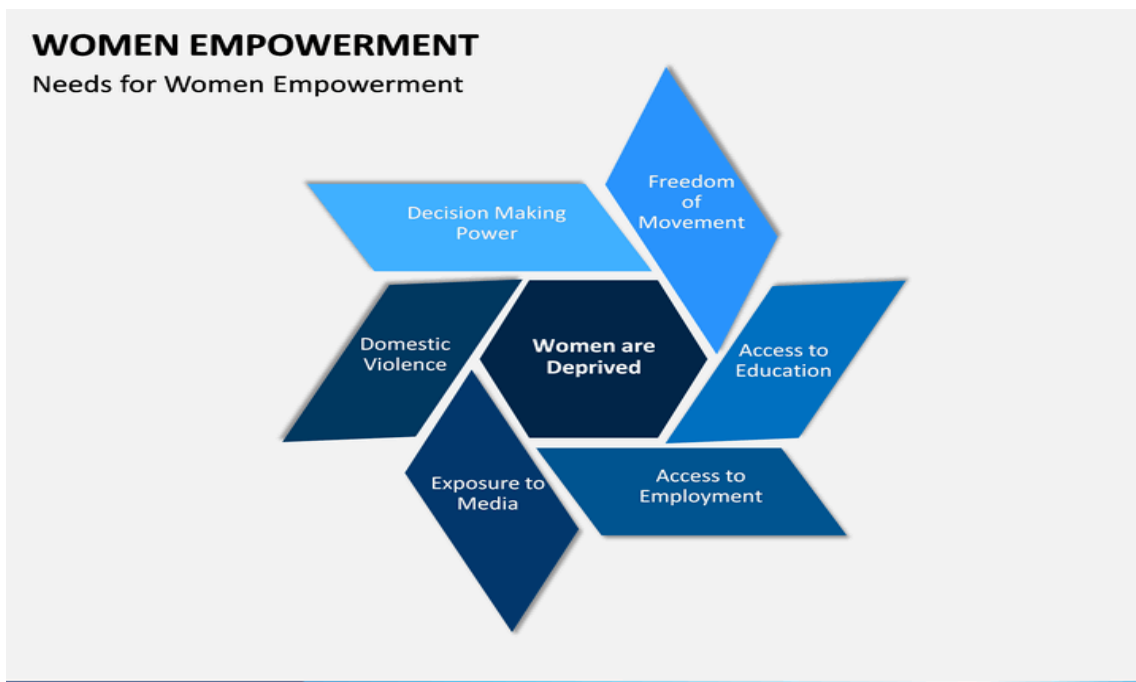
The first step begins at a personal level. An individual woman develops feelings of personal power, command and self-sufficiency over material and inherent choices she has to make.

Second step, empowerment takes place on interpersonal level. Here a woman influences the decision making power of another woman through their contact and working together.

Third step, they emphasize the goals for social action and social change. A community development programs develops through a group effort. A community development programs can lead to individual empowerment and interpersonal empowerment.

Dandikar (1986) described empowerment as a multidimensional process, which includes-

- ❖ Economic capacity
- ❖ Human capacity
- ❖ Social capacity
- ❖ Gender equality
- ❖ Political influence



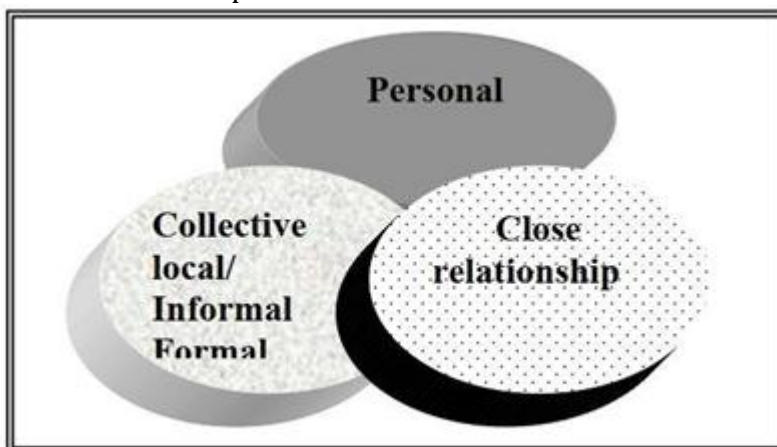
Dimensions of Women Empowerment

According to Rowland, empowerment to be within three dimensions:

Personal: Developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the defects of internalized oppression.

Rational: Developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.

Collective: This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on co-operation rather than competition.



Indicators of Women Empowerment

Syed Hashemi (1996) developed eight empowerment indicators where to be empowered-

- ❖ Mobility
- ❖ Economic security
- ❖ Ability to make small purchases
- ❖ Ability to make larger purchases
- ❖ Involvement in major decisions
- ❖ Relative freedom from domination by the family
- ❖ Political and legal awareness
- ❖ Participation in public protests and political campaigning

Forms of Empowerment

There are three forms of empowerments-

- ❖ **Economic empowerment:** Women's economic empowerment includes women's ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies; and increase voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.
It is good for economic growth and business. Economically empowerment of women ensures participation in decision making within a household; drive to participate in politics.
- ❖ **Political empowerment:** It includes women's representation on elected bodies. Political empowerment is a road to women's equality, rights and fulfillment, involvement in political matters and process. It is a major path to women's political participation and in the decision-making process.
- ❖ **Social empowerment:** Social empowerment includes equal access to education and health care for women. It mitigates gender gaps in human development across nations.

Approaches of Women Empowerment

Welfare Approach: This approach considers women as the workforce and target for development. Women are beneficiaries but not active participants in development.

Efficiency Approach: This approach considers women, essentially, not as beneficiaries of intervention, but as major resource in development. If development is more efficient, it must include the participation of women. It keeps women into the mainstream of development and assumes that if they participate, they will automatically benefit.

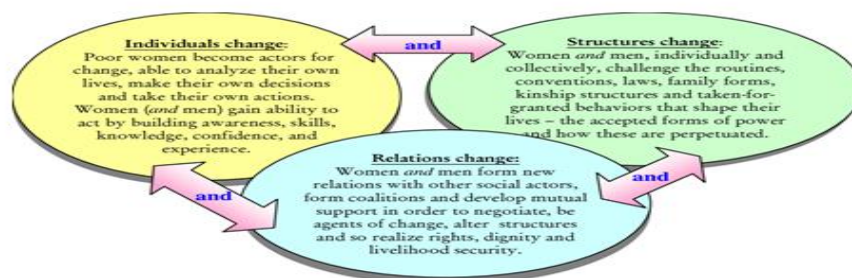
Equity Approach: This approach wants promoting women's status, power and control so that they can be effectively equal with men. It seems women equal right.

Empowerment Approach: Feminists seek to empower themselves through greater self-reliance. Women seek to influence their own change and the right to determine their own choices in life. It seems women need appropriate resources to achieve self-sufficiency.

Gender and Development Approach: It recognizes the active involvement of women in development by utilizing the capacity of women at the optimum level. It can be achieved by planning and implementation of the programs.

Practice

Generally women are backward part of society. A society never be developed keeping its women in dark. Women are deprived of decision making power, freedom of movement, access to education & employment and scapegoat of domestic violence. Women face gender discrimination, inequality and socially oppressed people with the burden of dowry, child marriage and other crimes like raping, killing, and humiliation.



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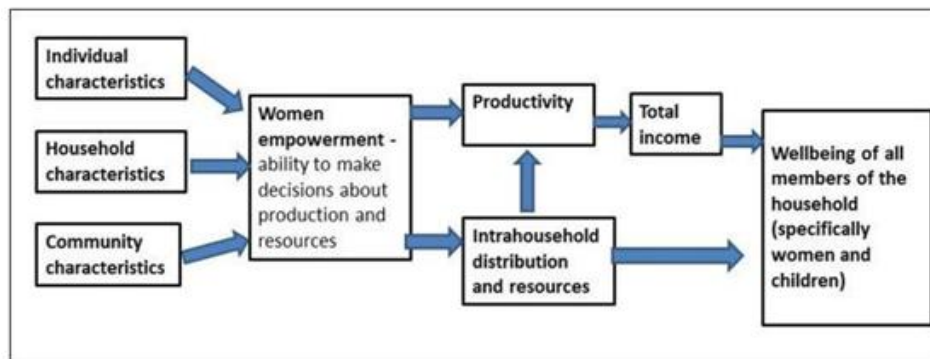
Importance

Women empowerment helps improving the standard life of women in rural and cities, preventing crimes against women, reducing domestic violence, bringing lots of social and economic gains, solving societal issues like poverty, unemployment and birth control, achieving comprehensive growth in every sector of society. It can help in nation building process by joining in defense forces, social service, politics, education and corporate levels.

Women empowerment helps women promoting education which leads to employ a large number of populations. It is actually a social development as a whole.

It provides equity and equality for women in every aspects of life. That leads to a safer and peaceful environment for all worldwide.

According to Kate Young (1993), empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change.



CONCLUSION:

Women empowerment enables women to realize their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives. It has mainly five dimensions; economic, political, social/cultural, personal and familial. Each dimension is very important because the real empowerment of women is possible only when a woman enjoys full access to economic resources, more strength and courage for entering into the power structure, more involvement through social/cultural relationships and participation, more self-motivation and confidence, and more say in the family matters. If women are empowered the nation will be benefited. The country will be free from a large burden of illiteracy, unemployment as well as curse.

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