



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women are embracing the concept of empowerment because of their situations - their disempowerment and their unmet needs. As women have increasingly discovered their commonalities through improved means of communication and through international conferences such as the 1995 NGO Conference in Beijing, they have attempted to understand the global and local, political, economic and cultural forces that shape these situations. While there are many factors that play a role in gender based satisfaction an examination of international development during the past half century provides insight into some of these factors.

KEYWORDS: concept of empowerment , local, political, economic and cultural forces.

1.1)INTRODUCTION :

The changes in the world since the end of 2nd world war have been profound, in the third world many of these changes- positive and negative have occurred under the rubric of development.

The assumptions of the modernization theorists, who had in some sense a global perspective, are particularly important to understanding of the effects of development on women. They saw one road along which all the countries travelled, regardless of where they started. Since all aspects of a society were synergistically modernised the end was universally desirable and the process was inevitable, there was little reason for them to consider differential impact. The modernists, when they did take women into account, thought of them as the reargued- the most underdeveloped of the underdeveloped: women's relative backwardness, like that of rural peasants, is explained as the stubborn and irrational persistent of traditional attitudes. That is to say: women were responsible for their own exclusion from the benefits of development, the process of development were not to blame.

1.2) WOMEN STATUS IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY IN INDIAN:

In the traditional society of India, majority of women are poor illiterate or uneducated and insufficiently trained ill equipped or not in a position to propel themselves out of their traditionally unfavorable unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions. Oppression and atrocities on women are still rampant even today. Patriarchy continues to be embedded in the social system in several regions in India. Actually, women make up 48% of India's population. Therefore, there can be no any progress unless the needs and interest of women are fully met. Empowerment of women would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Indian women need to be physically healthy so that women are able to take challenges of equality. But it is still lacking in a majority of Indian women especially in the rural parts. They have unequal access to basic health resources and lack of counseling.

Today's changing socio-cultural systems are universal factors. These factors have brought many changes in the socio-economic conditions of the people. Changes and transformation in a specific area have an influence in other realms of the society too. An emergent phenomenon is the increasing flexibility and changes in the roles of men and women.

1.3 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT- CONCEPT:

Empowerment which means "becoming powerful" is a process by which individuals, groups and communities are able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals. It enables them to work towards helping to empower themselves in educational, economical, psychological, social and political aspect. Economic development through financial assistance has proved to be an effective tool for women empowerment. Empowerment of women in Indian context primarily means that they should be able to turn their aspirations into policy and law. They should have control over their lives and livelihood decisions. They should also be able to pursue self-realization and self-assertion, and live informed, rational, self-interested lives as those in the upper reaches of Indian society. Over the past few years equality of gender and empowerment of women have been explicitly recognized as a key not only to the nation's health but also to socio-economic development. Progress towards gender equality requires increases in gender equality. Therefore, empowerment is the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- 1) Having decision making power of their own.
- 2) Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision.
- 3) Having a range of options from which they can make choices.
- 4) Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making.
- 5) Having positive thinking on the ability to make change.
- 6) Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- 7) Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated.

Empowerment of women in its broadest sense refers to women's increased power. In a development context the term women empowerment refers to internal change within an individual's sense of self autonomy, and external change in social status and basic power relationship in society. Empowerment is described as the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them. Women empowerment is an active multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their identity and powers in all spheres of life. It is a process of awareness and capacity building. Leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control of the transformative action. It covers individual and collective transformation and strengthens their innate ability through acquiring knowledge power and experience.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1) Women empowerment-

- (a) "Women empowerment in simple words can be defined as the functions or activities by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices."
- (b) "woman empowerment in the process of acquiring the ability to make strategic life choices in relation where the ability has previously been denied"
- (c) "Woman empowerment is a function of growing intrinsic capability greater self-confidence and inner transformation of women consciousness that enables them to overcome external barriers"
- 2) Social empowerment of women – "social empowerment of women is a process of commanding respect and dignity for the women in the family in particular society in general, equal to the main counterparts."
- 3) Economic empowerment of women – "economic empowerment of women is a function through which women can actively participate in economic activities like production, distribution, providing services, distribution, commanding and controlling etc."

1.4) CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT:

The word empowerment represents a concept for which there are neither synonyms nor a consistent definition. Julian R (1984) writes- the idea is more important than the thing itself. We do not know what empowerment is, but like obscenity. We know it when we see it. It is difficult to frame positive definitions of Empowerment because, it has components that are psychological and political and it takes on a different form in different people and contexts. According to Wallenstein and Bernstein (1988), "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 society. With this perspective empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change.

1.5) WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Historical Perspective – Indian women in ancient time before 200 BC were very fortunate because they were treated on a par with men. The Vedic initiation and wearing of the sacred thread was for girls and boys. Women were eligible to learn and recite the Vedas and other religious texts just like men, perform sacrifices, choose to remain unwed if they wished to pursue and above all they could choose their life partners in life. During the Vedic age women gave full status with men. They were honored and respected in society. Therefore, women's status and education was at its peak at the time. That time women were regarded as great source of power, peace, satisfaction and knowledge for men. The importance of women has been explained in the Vedas at various places.

Between 200 BC and 1200 AD, the damage in women's social position and therefore their chance for getting educated was become more and more evident due to the thinking relating to a women's role was changing. In way which were adverse to women and their progress. They began to lose the privileges for religious participation and for education and were treated like inferior caste.

1.6) VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

As stated earlier women empowerment concept have a multi dimensions. At individual level women empowerment is related to socio-economic development, political and social consciousness. All these factors can be categorized as financial or economic empowerment social empowerment educational empowerment, Political empowerment, Psychological empowerment. In the subsequent paragraphs researcher has explained the various dimensions of women empowerment in brief.

Concept of women entrepreneurship : " An enterprise owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated by the enterprise to women," Govt. of India.

i) Financial or Economic Empowerment: All the programmes / schemes which are related to poverty alleviation are focused on women because they are more disadvantaged than men. Their uplift and bring them in the main stream of the society is a critical task. Financial or economic empowerment is nothing but making women aware about their status, role and their importance in the development of economy. Financial empowerment processes provide them space for attaining financial independence. These processes account their important contribution to the process of production and economy of the nation. In financial or economic development the approach of women empowerment focuses on the mobilizing the self-help efforts of the poor women, rather than providing them with social welfare facilities Economic empowerment of women is a activity or a step which is to be reached through strategic. Designing and concentrating on to build credit worthiness and economic independence among women by removing the barriers of gender discrimination and prevent them from gaining access to their share in the life. Therefore, economic or financial empowerment is important with a view to enabling women to seek justice and equality, because without financial development women cannot be able to exercise their rights.

ii) Social Empowerment: Social empowerment strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures. Social empowerment focused on the social discriminations existing in the society in terms of disability, ethnicity, religion, gender etc. In a simple word social empowerment means a more equitable social status for women in society. It is the responsibility of the society to ensure human dignity to all members of the society. It is argued that facilitating women's access to money is not an effective means for achieving empowerment of women unless it is related to other functions such as awareness training, and its impacts, women's subordination term of self-esteem and on the meaning and benefits of empowering women. When women will able to take a decisions related to their family matters, they will be in a position to take a decision for improving the poor socio-economic status. Women's participation at the decision making level can only be said to lead to their increased development and empowerment if such participation enable them to achieve greater control over factors of production, access to resources and the distribution of benefits. Shrinivastav R. S. (2001) has found that, women's social empowerment from the perspective of their vulnerability to various kinds of exploitations. In the opinion of Shrinivastav, it is important to empowering women socially, so that they can break away from male domination and claim equality with male.

iii) Political Empowerment : Through the political empowerment women are able to increase their mobility and break their isolation, with a view to improve their self-confidence and self-image. Political empowerment help to women to establish their public presence whereby they can freely involved in decision making in an expanding frame work of awareness and critical analysis to contract and influence the direction of development. Political empowerment of women induces right to candidature etc. Due to political empowerment their role as women, as a campaigners, members have improved and their involvement is increased in the decision making process. The participation of women in the political process. The participation of women in the political process indicates their political awareness, political consciousness and their aspiration for status enhancement.

iv) Educational Empowerment : Traditionally education is recognizing as an important tool of personal development. Education enable individual to grow his / her intellectual horizons, wellbeing and potential for empowerment. Today, educational empowerment is considered as the important tool of socio-economic and political transformation of women. Educational empowerment creates self-confidence, self-esteem, self-sufficiency to women. It also brings light of hope, increases social, political, cultural, religious and intellectual consciousness. Apart from this educational empowerment also broadens the length of mind and removes narrowness, superstition and enhances fellow feeling, tolerance etc. it is proved that educationally empowered women are able to participate in decision making, formulation and implementation of various policies and programmes. Education plays an important role in this sphere. When women are educationally empowered they could be able to understand their actual rights which have been already given to them by the constitution.

v) Psychological Empowerment : Psychological empowerment of women enable them to transgress the traditional and patriarchal taboos and social obligation when women involved in political parties educational institutions or any decision making bodies, having own land, properties wealth etc. they feel psychologically powered and build their self-confidence recognize their self-worth and take control of their own income. The psychological empowerment has given them self-respect, pride maturity and resiliency as they have excelled their independence away from home. Psychological empowerment also provides them mental strength and makes them firm, tough and hardworking and women learn the art of living and learn how to adjust with the changed circumstances. Apart from this psychological empowerment provides satisfaction in different ways pertaining to work, living learning and coping with personal and financial situations.

1.7) CONCEPT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS :

Women entrepreneurship development is an important element of human resource development. It is a recent concern amongst women in India. Women entrepreneurs can be explained as the women or group of women who start, organized and operate an enterprise. According to the government of India,

“women entrepreneurs are those who owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to women.” There are many pull and push factors due to which women to have an independent business or occupation to have well financial condition and social conditions. A sense towards independent decision making on their life and career is the motivational factor behind this urge. Coping with family responsibilities women want to get independence. Due to some influencing factors women choose a profession as a challenge and as an urge to do something new which would be helpful for their family life as well as their personal life. Such situation is known as pull factors, Family compulsion and responsibility which thrust upon women are known as push factors. These push factors engaged women in business activities.

Women entrepreneurship is not only an out of business function, but also it boosts the economy for everyone. Women entrepreneurship empowered women and women can smash scarcity not only for themselves, but also for their families, community and nation also. Therefore, the policy makers cannot neglect the fact that women are now a promising economic force. Today women entrepreneurs have been making an important blow in all the segments of the economy which is more than 25% of all types of business. The more importance for women entrepreneur’s development by the government the higher. The status and position of women that caused to better living conditions for families. Therefore development of women entrepreneurship is the significant tool of women empowerment women empowerment leads to self-fulfilment and they become aware of where they are going what is their status in the society their existence and rights through the entrepreneurship development women are becoming more empowered, individually and financially.

1.8) NEED OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT :

In these days business world is changing rapidly and changes are noticeable in a variety of directions. One of the most fundamental changes brought about since Independence of India. Independence has been the comparative emancipation of women their emergence from the exclusive seclusion of the home into the world’s activities.

Existence of women in the economy as an entrepreneur has been an important development in the process of their emancipation and in their securing deserved place in the community. Today, women entrepreneurs have achieved the nation wide recognition and they are contributing to the country’s economy. After Independence the social changes in the country have affected practically on the people. Among the middle class urban educated population all the social changes have affected women much more than men. The changed socio - economic conditions have widened various opportunities for women’s education and employment and have provided them new avenues to express and assert their equality.

Increasing importance of women entrepreneurs in the economy and their requirement for fuller involvement in the development process are now widely acknowledged. There is growth in number of entrepreneurial women, but the economic value of their contribution to the economical and industrial development is yet very limited. Women entrepreneurs are trying to constructively use their entrepreneurial talents and attempt to achieve a definite place in the prestigious occupational spheres, which had traditionally the premise of men. This shows that a vital change in the perception of women pertaining to their own capacities and their own place and status in society. They may be numerically but qualitatively they are of great importance and their role in improving the status of women in society has been of great importance.

Economic development of any country is enormously dependent on the effective harnessing of human resources both manpower and women power. It is essential to harness women power if substantial economic improvement or development requires to be achieved. For this purpose, the professional, technical and physical skills of women have to be used effectively and economically. Educated women have more significant role to play in the economy of the country. But women entrepreneurship has yet to take a deep root in India. Though men and women in India are almost equal in numbers and even though

participation wise they have involved into all types of activities, the number of women entrepreneurs is conspicuously very low.

Actually, the increasing numbers of women are getting into the employment category and are competing in the employment market. Therefore, there is a need to bring more and more women in the purview of entrepreneurship. It is more productive if women are drawn into the small scale sector where the scales of operations have strong linkage with technology, innovativeness, flexibility in operation decision making etc.

Considering the experience of western countries' economies the government of India has setup various financial institutions, training institutions with a view to enhance women entrepreneurial activities. Through these institutions they offer a wide range of incentives measures to women entrepreneur for providing an impetus to industrialization.

Entrepreneurship development among women improves their socio-economic status and to the family in particular. Today's Indian women are willing to take up innovative entrepreneurial functions that were once considered the preserve of men and have proved that they are second to no one with respect to contribution to the growth of the economy of the country. Therefore there should be proper moulded entrepreneurship among women with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet the changes in trends, challenges markets and also be competent enough to sustain and strive for excellence in the entrepreneurial field.

1.9) IN CONCLUSION :

In the 21st century India is witnessing a major women's upsurge which is the result of the cumulative and interactive effect of the sustained efforts of government, NGO's and financial institutions banks etc., the movement of women and the civil society at various fronts over the last two decades. The status of women in Indian society depends on a large extent on economic empowerment. If a woman is earning independently of the income of the household or if she has control over the productive or even non productive assets of the household, her value, esteem and even power of bargaining within the household and in the community and the society at large increases. Economically empowered women has to face less altitudes of discrimination in the society than a non-earning one although her dual role as mother and husband within the family and worker outside puts additional strains on the women, which is not always compensated by her income.

Socio-economic empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in India today. The socio-economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship development among them is being regarded these days as an important tool for development of country's economy. Therefore, the issue of economic and social empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers, women activists, politicians, academicians and administrators. Gender inequality is now receiving greater attention. Women, better known as half of the humanity, have long been neglected in their roles as beneficiaries in the process of development. The governments (central and states) are keen to ensure that women are empowered both economically and socially through entrepreneurship development, and they become equal partners in the economic development of the nation along with men.

Today's, Indian women are entering into science engineering and technology even while facing several socio-economic cultural and technical difficulties. Women empowerment movement through entrepreneurship development can gain momentum. This would definitely enhance their socio-economic status a prerequisite of women's empowerment.

With the advent of the 21st century, unprecedented changes and reforms have been witnessed in the domain of science and technology. The future of the gender barriers is being looked at with a hope that women entrepreneurs shall be viewed as the power that enhances socio-economic growth and thereby shall as prop to the development of the society and the country at large.