CHAPTER IV

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
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4.1 Concept and dimension of women empowerment:

The National Policy for empowerment women 2001, admits, “There 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 aims 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 point of view. The later plans took this issue with a strategy for their empowerment. Yet, in spite of broad frame work and perspective for women’s empowerment it is imperative that these initiatives and strategies are translated into social-political educational and cultural empowerment of women.” (Naryan, Saben & Lakshmi, 2005)

Women are symbolized as a proud and noble symbol of creation and regeneration. It is the spirit that informs their struggle for the emancipation of women from economic, social and political structure of inequality.

The system which generates inequalities between men and women is an important issue. The problems behind the women’s participation in society cannot be isolated from the overall structure and culture of society. Hence it is necessary to view the women’s participation along with those of other classes and categories of the present society. Women cannot be generalised as an omnibus class in opposition to men, for women too among themselves are distinguished by class, caste, religion, tribal ethnicity among the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited. Therefore, women’s problems cannot be attended to in isolation from the inequities that flow out of an inequitions system. (Chanana, 1988)
The term empowerment is frequently heard today, whether in the media or in the classroom. It is clearly connected to the word “power”, simply speaking empowerment is derived from the word ‘empower’ meaning to give or to acquire power or to increase power. Thus, the word empowerment also implies a change in the equation or level of power. It can therefore be viewed as both a process as well as a result of social change.

Empowerment literally means making someone powerful, facilitating the weak to attain strength, to increase one’s self esteem to help someone, to confront injustice and oppression and to support someone to fight for their right. Empowering women actually means strengthening them to confront family, community, caste, religion and traditional forces, patriarchal forces and working within the Government Departments. This inevitability ensures their full participation in every aspect of social and national development. This participation is necessary to increase the productivity level of women. Thus, women empowerment is interpreted in decision making increased access to productive resources, expanded choices, right and control over the body and life.

According to UN, the main principles of women empowerment are-

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.

2. Treat all men and women fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.

3. Ensure the health, safety and well being of all women and men workers.

4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.

5. Implement enterprise development supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.

6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality”

And according to United Nations, women empowerment has five components –

a) Women’s sense of self worth.

b) Their right to have access to opportunity and resources.

c) Their right to have and determine choices.

d) Their right to have power and control their own lives within and outside the home.

e) Their ability to influence the direction of social change create a more just social and economic orders nationally and internationally.

Srilata Batiwala, a well known women activist has defined women empowerment as the “Process by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources and the gender based discrimination against women in all institution and structures of society.”

These are two ways of understanding the process of empowerment.

I. It is an externally indeed process involving the creation of conditions which enable women to exercise their autonomy.

II. Self empowerment whose woman find time and space to re-examine their lives critically and collectively.

Women are aware of the economic, legal, social and political dimensions of the process. Each of these dimensions is inter-related to the others.
Here,

Economic empowerment means a better quality of life through sustainable livelihood owned and owned by women.

Legal empowerment is the provision of effective legal structure which is supportive of women’s empowerment.

Social empowerment implies more equitable social status for women in society.

Politically empowered means the involvement in the politics and struggle and movement based work are important preconditions.

Thus, we find the concept of women empowerment in here that –

I. Equality with the man

II. Social participation

III. Economically empowered

IV. Political participation

V. Decision making capacity

VI. Leadership ability.

Above factors positively encourage to achieve the equity and fruitfulness remedies for empowering the women in our society.
The process of empowerment has five dimensions.

They are cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical dimensions.

I. The cognitive dimension implies to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the every levels. It deals with making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;

II. The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;

III. The economic dimension requires that the women have to access their productive resources and ensuring the financial autonomy.

IV Political dimension approach implies that women have the capacity to organise and mobilise the society.

V The physical element implies that the women have the ability to protect themselves against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

4.2 Women empowerment in Indian Perspective:

Throughout the history of India, The double standard regarding the status of women is evident. In literature and religion, women are highly placed but in domestic, political and economic scenario, women occupy a lower status and are subject to discrimination and exploitation. However, the life of ordinary women has been confine to the four walls of households, over burdened with domestic works, controlled of her mobility and personal freedom by the men of the household since time immemorial.
The recorded history of India began with the arrival of Aryans in 15th century B.C., when the Vedic era began. Vedic culture was widespread until the arrival of the Muslim in 18th Century. In the Rig Vedic period, both men and women were engaged in food gathering and partook equally the struggle for survival. Both men and women could participate equally in politics, economics and religious functioning.

Medieval Indian history spreads over 500 year (AD1200 to AD1700). It is predominantly the history of Muslim rulers, where the Sikh religion was appeared. Some empowering element with regard to the status and role of women were seen during medieval age. Muslims rules in India divided into two eras, that was Delhi Sultana and the Mughal era The Only women who had ever occupied the throne of Delhi were Raziya Sultana who was not only a wise ruler but also a woman of dauntless coverage. She set the role model for politically empowered women in India. The role that Muslim women have played in the medieval period of Indian history since then has been very significant.

The Mughal era in India saw the rise of some eminent Muslim women, Qutlag Migar, Babur's mother gave wise counsel to her so Babur, Nur Jahan the greatest Muslim queen and Jahanara took an active part in the state affairs Gulbadan Begum was a woman of exceptional poetic talent, Mumtaz and Chand Bibi were the women who always remembered in Indian history.

However, in the Mughal era, the ordinary women were always suffered. Sociologist describe the Mughal era as the dark age of women. Women no longer enjoyed the freedom of the earlier time even within the family and their importance became nil.

Modern India refers to the period from A.D. 1700 to AD. 1947. Modernization of India began with the Europeans. The British Government took bold step to reform the caste ridden Indian social order. The first was the
abolition of Sati by law on humanitarian ground. It was on 4 December 1892. The British Government in India passed the famous resolution by which Sati was made crime.

British Government introduced women education. Women education was truly a wonderful achievement of the reformation. Christian Missionary helped in improving the status of women. A few educated Indian such as Francir Sorabji, Ramabai Ranade and Pandita Ranabai were among those who had dedicated themselves for the cause of women education. It was in 1917 that the first University was founded in Poona.

All India Women’s Conference was formed in 1927 to discuss the issues of women education, child marriage, and political right of women.

Vivekananda laid great stress on the education of women in religion, art science, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, sewing and hygiene. He has a strong conviction that women should be taught the value of liberty; self-initiative and heroism. Ram Krishna Mission has opened up opportunity for me women to enter active social work. Many women have joined the Mission. The Mission has enhanced the mobility of women and their social participation.

Gandhiji championed the cause of women. He considered women as the personification of self-sacrifice.

Indian National Congress (INC), the first National polii i .af party founded by A.G. Hume in 1885 has taken steps to uplift women's status of India. Most of political movement of INC had good participation of women. As president of Indian National Congress in 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru accepted equal political and legal right of women.
G.K. Deodher, One of the founder members of the Servants of Indian Society (SNDT) dedicated a major part of his life for the cause of women's education. He was a staunch protagonist of widow remarriage.

Indian National Movement gave many opportunities for women for participation in social and political activities. Several politically empowered women rose in prominence during and after the Nationalist Movement. The period from 1857 to 1947 was an era of enlightenment and empowerment as far as women are concerned. These women laid the foundation for women's struggle for empowerment in 20th century.

Many women set heroic models for empowerment women. Such as – Sarojini Naido, close disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, was a born orator and poet whose intellectual life was the center for her inner being. She sang melody of Indian's glory through her writings, speeches and poetry.

Kamala Devi was a born rebel. Her courage, patience & power of endurance made her exemplary youth leader. She was the first among the women to join the Civil Disobedience of Gandhi ji.

Annie Besant, though not an Indian, was a good creative writer and above all a good political leader. She worked for the rightful recognition of women's position in society and demanding franchises for women on the same term as men.

Mother Teresa is described as the Angel of Mercy, helping the sick, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, destitute children and homeless women in India has been her life's mission. Mother Teresa got the Nobel peace prize in 1979.

Other women who had distinguished themselves in various field were lady Venkata Subha Rao, founder of the Madrass Seva Sadan, and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, who was the first women legislature in the then British
India. Smt. Rukmini Lakhmipati was the first women Salt Satyagraha prisoner in 1931. Smt. Radha Bai Subbrayan was a great educationist and social reformer.

Women of India are now uplifted, emancipated, and granted equal status with men in all occupations - political, economic, social, defense, domestic, education, business, etc. They have a franchise they are free to join any service or follow any profession. Free India has besides her woman prime minister woman ambassador, women cabinet minister, woman legislators, women governor, woman scientist, engineer- doctor- space researcher- giant IT specialist woman public officer, judiciary officer, and in many more responsible positions. No distinction is now made in matters of education between boys and girls. Their voice is now as forceful and important as that of men. They are becoming equal partners in making or dismissing of a Government.

As an example, we can remember some women personalities. Some of the women who have made their impressive presence in Indian Policy as well as in the media in the new millennium are Medha Patkar, Kiran Bedi, Late Mangeshkar, Mrs. Sonia Candhi, Menaka Gandhi, Smt Shila Dikshit, Anjo George, Kalpana Chaola, Arundhati Roy, Lviamta Benerje etc.

The principle of women empowerment is enriched in the constitution of India in its fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Indian constitution not only says about the equality of women, but also asks the states to take measure of positive discrimination in favour of women. In India, the plan and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. Thus has been a remarkable shift in the women’s empowerment from the fifth five year plan (1974-1978). The empowerment of women has been recognised as the key issue in determining the status of women.
In India of the 19th century women suffered from the denial of freedom in their own homes. It was in such an oppressive scenario that movements for social reform developed within different religion. Eminent person like Iswar chandra Vidyasagar and Jotiba phule wanted to rid Indian society of the twin plagues of religious superstition and social inequality. A progressive movement to make educational opportunities available to women took shape in the latter part-of the 19th century. On the work front women were faced with gender specific work areas and role. In India, a series of laws have been enacted to encourage women’s participation in different activities of society. Legislations have been enacted to ensure that women get the same rights and privileges as are enjoyed by men. However, discrimination against women continues to exist.

It is generally accepted that the economic status of women is an indication of a society’s stage of development. The extent of women’s empowerment determines their political status.

The govt. of India announced 2001 as the year of women’s Empowerment named as Swashakti. The National Policy for the Empowerment of women was passed in 2001.

According to this policy, the chief goal is to bring out the advancement, development and empowerment of women by implementing various schemes and programmes. Economic condition, political participation, beliefs of the women, health and safety, social securirty, employement for women, equal opportunity with men etc. are the main issues of the policy which prevail the women empowerment in India.
The initiatives of the policy were taken by govt. for empowerment of valuable and marginalized groups and especially for women. Some of the schemes are as follows—

- Schemes of National schedule tribes finance and development corporation-
- Integrated child development scheme
- National rural health session
- Janani suraksha yojana
- Integrated child protection scheme
- Swadhar- A scheme for women
- Difficult circumstances
- Antyodaya anna yojna (AY)
- Ujjawala- A scheme for Prevention and Trafficking and rescue Rehabilitation and Reintegration.
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)
- Sarva Shuksha Abhiyan (SSA)
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) – A conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme.
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAH)
- Scheme for working women Hostel
- Step (Support to training and Employment programme for women)
Presently, the govt. of India, the plan and policy makes help for the women. They concentrating on women education by implementing the scheme like ‘Beti Basao Beti Porhao’ and using to work like women participation in every sphere of life. Social and political participation may help to empowering the women in the country like India.

4.3 Women empowerment in Assam:

In Assam, the movement for empowerment of women is almost as old as the freedom movement in this part of the country. In early 1926, the women attending the Dhuburi session of the Assam Sahitya Sabha got together under the leadership of Chandrprabha Saikiani and announced formation of Assam Mahila Samiti, which was later known as Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti. Three years later, established the Tezpur District Mahila Samiti, a major constituent of the Asom pradeshik Mahila Samiti. It was under these two banners that the movement for empowerment of women made significant steps in empowering the women of Assam.

The long history of Assam is replete with several instances of women’s bold and strong roles in spite of their traditional roles in a personal family set-up. Women of Assam played a significant role in the freedom struggle too. Kanaklata Baruah, Mulagabharu etc. are the example of brave freedom fighter.

Women had also played a significant role in politics of Assam, such as Renuke Devi Barkakoti was the first women central Minister, Saiyada Anowara Tymon, the first women Chief Minister in Assam.

In Assam, the rural sector is dominant with 90% of its population living in 22,000 villages. Out of the total workers 77% are engaged in agriculture and its allied activities.
Female population is a significant force in Assam. The long term trend in the economic activities of females in rural area of Assam indicates that females continue to be women workers is higher in agriculture than in the other sectors of industry. In plantation and allied activities females work. The increase in the number of workers in agriculture as compared to non-agriculture is more marked in the case of females than that of male workers.

In the secondary section, the percentage of females engaged household industry is the highest in Assam among the major states of India. In Assam, out of every 1000 total cultivators 139 males have household industry as their secondary occupation against 707 females. These are 57 males and 106 females with household industry as supplementary occupation per 1000 agriculture labours.

The economic status of women in Assam indicates that in the large sector of village community consisting of cultivations, artesian and wage labours, women engage themselves in production and marketing of agricultural produce and handicrafts. (Choudhury, 2008)

We know education is a lifelong process. For development, enjoying modernity and a standard of living education is the key element which can show the way of bright future and ray of hope. Female education is an important input of the production function. It has important bearings on child health and their survival. Despite the importance of women education unfortunately only 39% of women are literate among 64% of men. The real picture is not in a positive way because of the North-East India has a lot of problems like terrorism, superstition and other social hindrance. When we go through the overall literacy rate of India then we notice that the rate of women literacy is so low than men. Table 4.1 shows the literacy rate in India.
Table 4.1

Literacy rate in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>65.38</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India (2011)
### Table-4.2

**Female literacy rate in NE India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the State</th>
<th>Female literacy rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India (2011)

According to the above table the state wise literacy rate in NE region had an average of 74.72%. This rate is high than the all India average rate which is 65.46%. The highest female literacy rate in Mizoram which is 89.4% and the lowest is 59.6% in Arunachal Pradesh. Women are growing well in the last 10 years and Government has been taken various steps and plan for the women education and empowerment.
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