CHAPTER V

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Women constitute about 48.2 percent of the total population of India, according to the census 2001 of our country. However they are not represented in social, political and economic life as per their numerical strength. Indian constitution in its preamble enshrines the principle of gender equality. The constitution also empowers the state to adopt positive discrimination in favour of women. The World Bank in its report has observed that women are often denied property and inheritance rights. An inequality trap may prevent generations of women from getting educated; restrict their participation in labour market. ¹ Swami Vivekanand had said that, there is no chance for the welfare of the world, unless the conditions of women are improved. Prof. Amartya Sen pointed out that, in family behaviour, inequalities between men and women are accepted as natural or appropriate. Sometimes the decisions relating to inequalities are taken and executed by the women themselves. In the new world order no country can march ahead without the inclusion of women in the development process.” ² Thus it becomes necessary to enable the women for accepting the challenges and actively participate in the development process of the nation. It is only possible if the status of women is upgraded through empowerment and properly represented in all walks of life”. A nation cannot be progressed if the women are left behind. It is as same as a bird cannot fly on one wing.” ³
Judicial gender equality and political empowerment, and economic independence of women are necessary to fight against several forms of social discrimination for bringing out change and promoting development. In a democratic country like India, participation of women in various processes of development is necessary for their empowerment. Direct participation of women in the independence movement and in the advent of nascent democracy in India opened up several opportunities for women to participate in politics and power. The initial beginning was made in this respect by appointing Balwantrai Meheta Committee in 1957. The committee in its report, recommended for introduction of two women representatives into Gram Panchayats to look into programmes relating to women and children. The committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) in 1975, recommended setting up of statutory women panchayats with administrative and financial autonomy to manage their own affairs. However the experiment failed to achieve any success. It is often considered that, inadequate or under representation of women in political bodies has been one of the factors responsible for their backwardness and insignificant participation in several fields of activity. In order to provide for adequate participation of women in this Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban local bodies, 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments were made in 1997, which made it mandatory to keep one third of seats reserved for women. This may be considered as a major milestone in the process of political empowerment of women in India. It also has provided for introduction of Bill for reservation of seats for women in the Union and state legislature introduced in parliament in July 1998.
Although women welfare was one of the objectives of Indian planning right from the beginning of the planning era, there was shift from welfare to development of women during the sixth Five year plan (1980-85). The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) included two main changes in the planning strategy. Empowerment of women became primary objective and secondly there was emphasis on convergence of existing services available in women related and women specific sectors. The tenth five year plan has made commitment towards “empowering women as the agent of socioeconomic change and development.” On the basis of the recommendations of National Policy for Empowerment of Women, the tenth plan suggests a three fold strategy for empowering women through Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Gender Justice.

What is Empowerment?

The term empowerment is a multi dimensional in nature and hence it has been interpreted as follows:

Ann Howard stated that “empowerment is motivating”, however motivation is not the only benefit of empowerment. ⁴

Invancevichetal define empowerment as encouraging and helps individuals and groups to make decisions that affect their work environment. ⁵
Yukul argued that, “empowerment is psychological, in that the follower’s intrinsic motivation and self efficacy are influenced by leadership behaviour, job characteristics, organization structure and their own needs and values.”

According to Rowland’s, “Empowerment involves undoing negative social construction, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions.”

The World Bank Report defines women empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individual women or groups of women, to make choices and to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes.”

“Women empowerment is a continuous process of enabling them to fight the forces that oppose them, provide them equal access to the resources and opportunities and control over resources”.

According to Lilly Kutty, “Empowerment of women means developing them as the individuals, of good awareness who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent decisions in matters that affect them and their nation.”
Women empowerment refers to the ability of women to transform economic and social development, when empowered, to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives through leadership, training, coaching, consulting and the provision of enabling tools for women to lead within their communities, regions and countries.  

According to Kabeer, “Womens empowerment is about the process by which those who have the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability. 

It may be noted that empowerment is a process and not as an instrumentalist form of advocacy, which requires measurement and qualification of empowerment. It is also observed that, different cultures have different distributions of power, with men making decisions in some areas and women making decisions in other areas. 

Once empowerment is identified as a primary development goal, neither the World Bank nor any other agency has developed a method for measuring and tracking changes in the levels of empowerment. If empowerment is equated with a role in decision making and control over household resources, then having sons and bringing in large dowries would be women’s empowerment. It may be concluded that, women empowerment, in short, indicates a change from powerlessness to powerfulness, under privileged to privileged and enabling the women to have control over the resources i.e. social, economic, political, intellectual, legal and cultural. Other research studies have suggested eight criteria of women
empowerment viz. occupational mobility, economic security, purchasing power, involvement in household decision making and freedom in family matters, etc.

Microreader (as cited by Rowland’s) defines empowerment as the process by which people, organization or groups who are powerless, become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context; develop skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives; exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and support the empowerment of others in the community.  

According to Moser, empowerment is the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and non material resources. 

5.1 Approaches to Empowerment

There are various approaches developed by the research scholars which may be summarized as follows.

Initially the women’s issues were considered as a development policy issue during mid 1970s which led to three types of development strategies for women, a welfare oriented approach, an equity approach and a poverty approach. By 1990s few more approaches were added, the efficiency
approach and the empowerment approach. Let us discuss them briefly as follows.

1) **The welfare Approach**

The welfare approach became very popular because welfare policies and programmes had no redistribution effects for men as they are implemented in a sex segregated environment and they were technically simple and politically safe to implement. They do not threaten to any one. According to Moser, the welfare approach assumes women to be passive recipients of development as women are responsible for motherhood and child rearing. The welfare approach is a traditional one, dating back to colonial times, when church organizations and missionaries were taking care of poor and needy women. They established schools for girls and organized mothers’ clubs. The development assistance, under the social welfare approach, provides relief aid to the vulnerable group, especially women and children and tends to play a complementary role to the financial requirements for promoting economic growth, has been popular even today. However the welfare approach considers women as mothers responsible for their children and family. It is basically a top-down approach where the women are entitled for aid and what is good for them. There is also, no intention to reduce the gender gap in such areas as education and employment.
The welfare approach has continued to be popular which is not only widely accepted but also institutionalized and is still followed by the voluntary groups including Non Government Organizations (NGOs), Women organizations and Government agencies.

2) **The Equity Approach.**

This approach emerged in Women’s Circles in early nineteenth century in the United States. These women circles were mainly concerned with development issues, with major emphasis on the adverse impact of economic development on women in the country.  

Boserup concluded in his research that the processes of modernization led to new sex patterns of productive work in which women actually lost grounds. In fact women should receive an equal share of the benefits of development. This approach emphasizes on achieving significant reduction in the equality between men and women. According to the equity approach, women are considered as persons in their own right, active participants in the process of development, emphasizing productive role to play. According to this approach, benefits of development should be shared equally between men and women in the country. Thus women should get more rights, more opportunities and more resources for them. As a result there will be redistributed effects with respect to gender relations and imply
more power to women in terms of determining choices in their lives. As a result, this approach failed to gain full support of male experts working in multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and in national planning institutions in developing countries. In order to oppose this approach, it is argued that the development in conveniences should not disturb the culture of the developing societies. This argument of cultural conservation is invoked to justify the continuous subordination of women. However this argument is generally neglected because, when a large scale infrastructure projects are implemented by some agencies or institutions, which may tend to disrupt the whole socio economic structure of the economy.

The institutionalization of equity approach has been emphasized in the documents related to the Women’s Decade, The World Plan of Action etc. Even the UN strategy of integrating women into the development process, has adopted equity approach. Any strategy which does not recognize the varied contribution of women to social and economic development and ignores the factors which hinder participation of women is conceptually faulty. Because it implies that activities performed by women do not form a part of development process and that women are not participating in development. The equity approach emphasizes on bringing women in or at least ensuring that they were not left out. The institutional consequence of the approach was the proliferation of government departments especially, in
charge of women affairs started acting as agencies with responsibilities (but little or no power) for monitoring the position of women and the effective use of ill defined integration strategies.  

3) **The Anti – Poverty Approach**

The equity approach was criticized on the grounds that, it focuses on poor women rather than all women and it implies that gains for women could be achieved with entailing losses for men. At the end of UN Development Decade (1960-70) it was realized that, the development is a slow and often frustrating process. Rapid growth of population tends to offset gains of development, and the benefits of rapid growth do not automatically reach the poor.

It was the speech of Mc Namarari, President of the World Bank in Nairobi in 1973 which wove together these concerns and it was suggested to adopt anti poverty approach. It implied a shift from the narrowly based strategies aimed at maximization of economic growth, to a plan for growth with redistribution, including target group approach for reaching the poor.

According to the ILO, the emphasis was on providing basic goods and services, such as food, clothing, shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities, where the participation of the people is implied in making the decision which affect them.
Under this approach women were perceived as being able to play an important role in the satisfaction of basic needs of their families, within the traditional framework of responsibilities, making their work burden easier, furthering their economic independence and a more equitable integration in the community. On the institutional front, the antipoverty approach implied investment in income generating projects for women, developing productive activities for poor women to supplement their income etc. The focus on poverty alleviation implies that the women’s problems are considered to be related to poverty and not related to subordination, and even if employment creation for women may lead to a stronger position in family and household, the antipoverty approach allows little scope for a fundamental problem of distribution of decision making power within gender relation.

4) **The Efficiency Approach.**

The economic crises of 1980s, the debt crises, the food water and energy crises shifted the focus of development thinking of economists from antipoverty approach to the problems of debt, trade and macro economic management. It was concluded that, it was the public sector which had failed to bring about sustainable development and to eradicate poverty. In many developing economies the public sector has expanded rapidly which has grown up into a huge bureaucratic apparatus, the cost of which has increased
significantly. In 1980s the government expenditure was reduced and attempts were made to streamline government services especially education, health and other social welfare services, and efficiency was considered as the goal of top priority. The World Bank and IMF insisted on reconsidering policies and programmes which had negative impact on poor in most of the developing countries, especially on women. 27

UNDP Human Development Report observed that, “Women have shouldered a large part of adjustment burden of the 1980s crisis. They make up for lost family income, they have increased production controlled home consumption, worked longer hours, slept less and often ate less.” 28

Moser recommended efficiency approach to overcome problems faced by women, where emphasis will be on development. The efficiency approach helps in reducing shifting of costs from the paid to unpaid economy especially through the use of women’s unpaid time. 29

Efficiency approach emphasizes strongly on the need for an efficient and active participation of women in the process of development planning and programming. “it leads to emphasis on the collection of data, base line studies, setting up indicators, monitoring trends and estimating the contribution of women in the process of development. Efficiency approach
assumes that, once women are recognized as efficient producers of development, equity will increases significantly.

5) **The Empowerment Approach**

The origin of the empowerment approach may be traced back to the International workshop on “Feminist Ideology and Structures” in the first half decade of “Women Development” organized by the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development in Bangkok in 1979. In the context of strategies for third world women, in the process of development and change, two long term feminist goals were formulated which indicate women’s struggle for liberation from oppression and discrimination in all spheres and at all levels of society. These goals were: (i) to get freedom from oppression for women involved not only for equity but also for the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives within and outside home (ii) to remove all forms of inequity and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.  

The main element of this view is that, only equity is not sufficient, while at the same time, the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives has been emphasized. Here power does not imply domination of others, but it includes four elements, as follows

i) A sense of internal strength and confidence to face life.
ii) The right to determine own choices in life.

iii) The ability to influence the social processes that affect their lives.

iv) An influence on the direction of social change.

Thus there is emphasis on the importance of women’s say at the personal level of gender relations in family and household and at the societal level in social processes and social change. The core of feminism is a commitment to breaking down the structures of gender subordination, a vision for women as full and equal participants with men at all levels social life.  

5.2 Static and Dynamic Dimensions of Empowerment :-

Empowerment concept has two dimensions, in the context of women, static dimension of empowerment considers women in terms of their capacities to participate in main decisions that directly or indirectly affect their lives and also to influence those decisions. It implies that women should have effective voice. The Dynamic concept considers empowerment as a process of developing the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in making and implementing decisions, that directly or indirectly affect them. As a process empowerment is related to individual or a group of individuals, it is not something to be given to people, although necessary conditions could be created that will help individuals to acquire empowerment by themselves.
The distinction between static and dynamic dimensions of empowerment is significant as it leads to the formation of different strategies. Static concept of empowerment may need exogenous strategies, while dynamic concept needs endogenous strategies. Exogenous strategies are built on the basis that disempowered groups can be empowered by external individuals or groups. The endogenous strategies are based on the premises that external groups can only facilitate empowerment by creating enabling conditions for dismembered groups to empower themselves. In other words, dynamic empowerment calls for endogenous strategy which implies a bottom up approach.

5.3 Stages of Endogenous Empowerment:

Karl has offered a useful framework for endogenous empowerment, consisting of four stages for empowerment of women. These stages are awareness, capacity building and skills development; participation and greater control in decision making and action for change. It has been assumed that capacity for awareness and skill can be developed, that would lead to the increase in the capacity to participate in exercising greater control over decision making, while empowerment can be realized by the use of the awareness and skills acquired. Garber has added two more stages, to facilitate a more systemic analysis of the process of empowerment. Thus six stage model may briefly be described as follows.
1) **Awareness Building stage:**

Being aware about current dismemberment and importance of empowerment is a necessary condition for achieving it. Building awareness about discriminatory practices against women, about laws that undermine their interest and cultural and traditional norms that perpetuate their subjugation and subordination are necessary steps for endogenous empowerment strategy. The history of feminism shows that, winning the votes in Europe and USA after the World War I was the result of a long struggle and sacrifice by women during the war. So to be informed about the cost of empowerment is an important part of the process of awareness.


2) **Skills and Capacity Assessment stage:**

This stage involves identifying the capacity and skill that is needed for effective participating, which is generally lacking among individuals or groups. This assessment is necessary to identify what changes should take place before the targeted individuals can be expected to participate effectively. An efficient assessment of needs may show some artificial barriers, such as those created by tradition and culture and are responsible for the problems identified, so that accordingly capacity and skill development strategy can be adopted.
3) **Capacity Building and Skills Development Stage:**

This stage of the empowerment process involves taking necessary steps to build capacity and develop relevant skills, on the basis of needs assessment results. It may be necessary to build capacity for planning, organizing, coordinating, and managing resources including human resources. These capacities and skills, along with other capacities and skills, are required for effective participation in the process of decision making.

4) **Participation and Greater Control in Decision Making Stage:**

This stage involves the use of capacities and skills acquired to participate in actual decision-making processes and to exert greater control over events taking place in the house, at the workplace, and in society. When capacities and skills are acquired, they must be used for taking right decisions at the right time and improving the bargaining power of women and discouraging the potential agents of dismemberment.

5) **Action for Change Stage:**

This stage consists of deliberate action by the empowered person or group to bring about desired changes to solve problems noticed earlier. The whole process is successful only if the acquired skills and capacity are used to bring about desired changes in the lives of the individuals or groups concerned and the lives of others in their communities.
6) **Capacity and Skills Assessment stage:**

During this last stage, attempt is made to assess the success or failure of the entire process, so that the results can be used as feedback into the next cycle of the empowerment process. Empowerment is not a one-time process, but once it is acquired, it has to be frequently updated. New information is fed back into the awareness stage for building new capability for positive action. A woman is rarely fully empowered but she must continue to update the skills and capacities required to become an effective participant in ongoing decision that surrounds her. It may be noted that evaluation is a continuous process in a dynamic scheme of enabling endogenous empowerment. This scheme explains that, empowerment assumes concrete form during the stages four and five, and the stages one, two, three and six provide exogenous environment which accelerates the process of empowerment.

5.4 **Strategies for Empowerment of Women:**

There are two types of strategies that are generally used. The first group of strategies aim at empowering women by improving their entrepreneurial capacity to become more self-reliant. This approach is common among development agencies and government. This approach takes two forms (a) improving economic status of women by way of providing them with employment, improving their capacity to be involved in income generating
activities and improving their access to credit facilities. (b) Integrated rural development, which in addition to improving the entrepreneurial self reliance of women, also focuses on the satisfaction of basic needs like education, literacy programmes, health issues etc.

The Empowerment of women is a complex and dynamic process, hence a single programme is unlikely to achieve the desired result. The bottom up strategy is likely to facilitate the process of empowerment. A programme that aims at empowering a women must start with listening and allowing them to determine what she wants and how she thinks that she will be empowered. It is necessary to get information of a woman’s choice and her own capacity to make her choice after getting skills and capacity assessment, capacity building skill development programme and evaluation that would enable her to make better choices and to act accordingly.

**National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)**

Within democratic framework, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different areas. From the Fifth Five year plan (1974-78) there 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 determining the status of women.
The Women’s movement and a wide spread network of non – Government organizations which have strong base at the grass root level and deep insight into women’s concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. However there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the committee on the status of women in India, “Towards Equality” 1974, and highlighted in the National perspective plan for women 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report 1988, and the Platform of Action, Five Years After – An Assessment.”

Gender disparity has been observed in various forms, the trend of continuously declining female ratio, in the population in the last few decades, stereo type social culture and violence at the domestic and social levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in some parts of the country. The causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices. The access of women especially these belonging to the weaker sections to education, health
and productive resources have been inadequate. Hence they remain poor and socially excluded.

“The goal of the policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of the women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stake holders for achieving its goals”

5.5 Policy Prescriptions

a) Judicial and Legal systems:

Legal – Judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women’s needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. New laws will be enacted and existing laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offence.

b) Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in the Development Process

“Policies programmes and systems will be established to ensure mainstreaming of women’s perspectives in all developmental processes, as catalysts, participants and recipients. Coordinating and monitoring mechanisms will also be devised to assess from time to time the progress of such mainstreaming mechanisms, Women’s issues and concerns as a result
will specially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, sectoral policies, plans and programmes of action.

(c) Economic Empowerment of Women

(i) Poverty Eradication:
Macro economic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. Steps will be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

(ii) Micro Credit:
In order to enhance women’s access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new, and strengthening of existing micro –credit mechanisms and micro finance institution, will be undertaken, so that out reach of credit is enhanced.

(iii) Women and Economy : 
Women’s perspective will be included in designing and implementing macro – economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio economic development as producers and workers will be recognized in the
formal and informal sectors and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions will be drawn up.

(iv) **Women and Agriculture**:

Women play a crucial role in agriculture and allied sectors, as producer’s concentrated efforts will be made to ensure that, benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion of their numbers.

(v) **Women and Industry**:

The important role played by women in electronics, Information Technology, food processing, agro industries and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They will be given comprehensive support in terms of labour, legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors.

(vi) **Support Services**:

The provision of support services for women like child care facilities including crèches at work places and educational institutions, homes for aged and the disabled will be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure their full cooperation in social, political and economic life. Women friendly personnel policies will
also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the development process.

(D) Social Environment of Women:

(i) Education:

Equal access to education of women and girls, will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life long leaning, as well as, development of occupation / vocation / technical skills by women. Reducing gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area, sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections of population Gender sensitive curriculum would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

(ii) Health:

A holistic approach to women’s health which includes both, nutrition and health services will be adopted and special attention will be given to the needs of women and the girls at all stages of the life cycle. The
reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality is a priority concern.

**(iii) Nutrition:**

In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz. infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focused attention would be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. Intra household discrimination in nutritional matters in respect of girls and women will be sought to be ended through appropriate strategies.

**(iv) Drinking water and Sanitation:**

Special attention will be given to the needs of women in the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation within accessible reach of households especially in rural areas, and urban slums, women’s participation will be ensured in the planning, delivery and maintenance of such services.

**(v) Housing and Shelter:**

Women’s perspectives will be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both in rural and urban areas.
(vi) Environment:

Women will be involved and their perspectives will be reflected in the policies and programmes for environment conservation and restoration.

(vii) Science and Technology:

Programmes will be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in Science and Technology. Girls will be motivated to take up Science and Technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully.

(viii) Women in Difficult circumstances:

In recognition of the diversity of women’s situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of specially disadvantaged groups, measures and programmes will be undertaken to provide them with special assistance.

(ix) Violence against Women:

All forms of violence against women, physical or mental whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively to eliminate its incidence.
(x) **Rights of Girl Child:**

All forms of discrimination against girl child and violation of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking punitive measures within and outside the family.

(E) **Operational Strategies: Action Plans –**

All central and state ministries will draw up time bound Action Plans for translating the policy into a set of concrete actions through a participatory process of consultation with centre / state Departments of Women and Child Development and National / State Commissions for Women. The Plans specifically covers the following:

i) Measurable goals to be achieved by 2010.

ii) Identification and Commitment of resources.

iii) Responsibilities for implementation of action plans.

iv) Structures and mechanisms to ensure efficient monitoring review and gender impact assessment of action plans and policies.

v) Introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process.

In order to support better planning and programme formulation and adequate allocation of resources, Gender Development Indices (GDI) will be developed, analysed and studied. Gender auditing and development of evaluation mechanisms will be undertaken.
F) **Institutional Mechanisms:**

Institutional mechanisms, to provide the advancement of women, which exists at the central and state levels, will be strengthened. National and State Councils will be formed to oversee the operationalisation of the policy on a regular basis,

G) **Resource Management:**

Availability of adequate financial, human and market resources to implement the policy will be managed by concerned Departments.

H) **Legislation:**

The existing legislative structure will be reviewed and additional legislative measures will be taken to implement the policy. 35

5.6 **Realities of Women Empowerment**

Although there are certain achievements in the process of empowerment of women in India, still a significant number of women continue to face the problem of poverty. Gender discrimination today is one of the most all pervasive forms of deprivation. The most outstanding demographic system of such deprivation is the persistence of an adverse sex ratio, which declined from 934 females per 1000 males in 1981 to 927 females per 1000 males in 1991 and 933 females per 1000 men in 2001. Gender violence, both societal and domestic continues even today. Women continue to be in marginal
employments and low levels of skills. Their contribution has been largely invisible. “Reproduction and responsibilities of nurturance, management of fragile environment and low paid or unpaid but heavy work responsibilities in agriculture, animal husbandry and other traditional sectors create a syndrome of gender stereotypes, marginalization, alienation and deprivation” 36

Women’s education is extremely important intrinsically as it is their human right and it is required for developing their capabilities. But most programmes for education of girls and women in India have reinforced gender roles especially motherhood in curriculum. Women as agents of social reform are not mentioned. Parents allow girls to study “as long as they would like to,” in the schools located in neighborhoods preferably with female teachers, but the same families who are willing to see girls in college react violently if the girl decides to choose her partner in marriage or challenge other norms of feminine behaviour. 37

However it has been realized that primary education helps in creating base while higher education is considered to be the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence, necessary to participate actively in the process of socio-economic development of a society. Higher education for women has gained a wider
role and responsibility all over the world. At present, in the twenty first century, one cannot afford to ignore the importance of higher education for women any longer. Women can achieve economic independence only if they are assigned a larger participatory role in various developmental activities in the society. Higher education helps women to serve the society sincerely and honestly by using their talents and creativity. Higher education is defined in India as the education attained after the completion of twelve years of schooling.

The total women students’ enrolment in higher education during the year 2006-07 was 47 lakhs (40.55%) against the total student’s enrolment of 116.13 lakhs. In the year 2007-08, women students accounted for 40.60 percent out of total 123.77 lakhs and in the year 2008-09, women students were 41.40 percent out of total 136.42 lakhs. Thus every year there was a marginal increase in the enrolment of women students. However it is necessary to motivate girls to enroll in large numbers in the faculties of engineering, technology, management and law. There is also a need to establish dedicated higher educational institutions and the government should provide financial support to women students who are enrolled in higher education as a long term investment in human capital. 38
During 2005-2006 the National Family Health Survey observed that overall fertility rate has declined for 3.4 to 2.7. About 40% married women and about 1/3 men in Orissa and Gujarat are thin for their height, under nutrition is lower in Punjab (12-14%), obesity is the major problem in Punjab as 38% women are overweight. The overall reduction of state resources in the welfare sector and especially less than 1% investment in health is going to enhance the existing gender bias in society.

In the context of political field, it may be observed that, “the percentage of women at various levels of political activity has risen from 4.5% to 25-40%. Women representation in the first Loksabha (1952-57) was 4.4 percent M.Ps accounting for 9.2 percent of the total MPs. Now “more than one million women have entered into political life in India and 43% seats are occupied by them at the district, province and national level. Women’s participation is understood in terms of voter turnout, number of women contestants apart from the number of those who succeeded in winning.” “Pre election training of voluntary organizations serves to build awareness about the duties, responsibilities of peoples’ representatives and about voting practices.” Women see effective and efficient functioning of panchayats closely linked to the issue of active women’s participation. 

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Entry into public space, utilization of authority in practice, trainings by government and non government agencies are all part of a process of gradual growth of knowledge, self esteem and empowerment which gives women the agency to function effectively in the political process.

In the context of decision making, NFHS II had reported that in the rural areas women take decisions about what items to cook (70%), health care for herself 26%, in purchasing jewellery (10%), 37% about how to spend money which they had earned. In urban areas these figures were 71%, 35%, 13% and 57% respectively.

5.7 Women and work:

Women’s work is statistically less visible, non-monetized and related to subsistence production, and domestic side, which accounts for 60% of unpaid family work and 98% of domestic work. Census estimates, 51.93% men and 25% of women are workers. Men are usually in stable employment. Malignity’s extrapolation estimates Rs. 23,773 Crores as the value of women’s household reserve rendered by women in the urban sector alone. 40

In developing countries the family incomes are relatively lower as compared to the developed countries. In order to achieve better standard of living, family income is supplemented by women’s work. Studies undertaken by
Desai as well as Hate point out that today educated women in India are no more contented in carrying out only the traditional female roles of a wife and mother. The main reason of women had to work was the low income of their men folk. ⁴¹

While defining working women, it has to be considered that, the work which she performs outside her house with high monetary value as a result of high education. The tedious labour of illiterate women at home and in own fields who comes from the poor family is generally not covered by a working women.

In Urban areas, education has contributed substantially to empower and develop women. Women are employed in administrative and managerial jobs’ and have entered in politics, medical, certain services etc. As compared to the rural women, women in urban areas are able to balance, to some extent, their role in family work. Urban women are provided with better wages and other benefits. She has right to work within working hours and she is able to take leaves whenever required. Urban employed women is able to put her children and other household work under the care of a hired care takers, because she can afford to do so, but a poor women in rural areas cannot afford to do so.
In urban areas women may get an advantage of her husband in helping her in household work like cooking, taking care of children, washing etc. This helps her to balance her time to play the role of a wife and a mother in family and as a professional in work area. Working women in urban areas are exposed to modernized world, she has access to modern technology, she is empowered enough to take decision on her own, at home or as a professional. She has decision making power not only to have less children but to decide about saving and investment opportunities, she can communicate freely with her husband and her voices and suggestions are always welcomed in her family.  

5.8 Indian Women work Force : Striking a balance between work and life

There is a substantial increase in the number of professional, self employed and educated women, on account of women generally do things systematically and can manage the resources efficiently and effectively. Women have an inherent talent for multi-tasking, organizing household activities, managing available resources, maintaining relationships and making firm decisions. “These qualities of women can be capitalized by identifying their potential and extending a favourable support to manage new ventures.”
According to Richa Sexena and Deepti Bhatnagar women suffer more career interruptions while career trajectories of men show mostly linear progress.\(^{44}\) Geetha Kannan describes how balancing family and work pressures can adversely affect a women’s career progression, women have to sacrifice their careers to take care of their families, a decision that is taken under pressure from relatives and society at large.\(^{45}\) Rahul Deo observed one area where women seem to be disadvantaged is, decision making, while men almost instinctively take upon themselves the role of the prime decision maker, this decision is more by acceptance than agreement of the women.\(^{46}\)

Neharika Vohra observed that, “Paucity of women at the top and at middle levels especially in the decision making roles is one challenge that organizations of today face. This is of concern not because there is a loss of contribution from the diversity and natural strengths that women bring to table. A particular occupation or role selected by a person himself depends upon the values learnt in childhood. These values influence the decisions a person makes about himself and others, ensuring that occupants in a role continue in positions that they traditionally have been.\(^{47}\)

Ashok Bhatia stated that, “Women’s attitudes were influenced by the family environment. She developed skills of good planner and organizer, people management and hospitality coming naturally to them. Innovation,
compassion, loyalty and resilience were the traits which they honed. As a process of evolution, better education exposure and changing mindset, women have started getting a lot more space in the so-called men’s world."  

Women have made entry into the labour market they still face obstacles at their work place which are related to the risks which working women face in their families and the society, a combination of career and family roles are often associated with conflict, overload and stress. Working women tend to give high priority to their role as wife and mother, which distorts their commitment to work. However women try themselves to cope up with the challenges. Hence organizations should implement family – friendly approaches to encourage women employees to balance their work – family challenges. Dissatisfaction among women employees can be reduced by improving quality of work life by providing attractive reward system and recognition of good work and by improving the working environment. Counseling may be provided for working women to solve work related problems."
CHAPTER V

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