

Empowerment of Women

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Abstract

Empowering of women pre-supposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the Perception of and expectation from women in our society. When a woman attains economic independence, she naturally becomes the mistress of her own decisions. Women Empowerment is a dynamic, multi – dimensional Process which enables women to realise their full uniqueness and powers in all spheres of life. The Year 2001 was observed as “Women’s Empowerment year.

Keywords: Empowerment, Uplift, Involvement, Emerged, Equal status, Concept

Introduction

Women Empowerment is a comprehensive and much debated issue and it is a dynamic multi – dimensional process, which enables women to realise their full uniqueness and powers in all spheres of life. Naturally, the more empowered women become the stronger in confrontation and produce the needs of the society when a woman attains economic independence, she naturally becomes the mistress of her own decisions. The growing social awareness across the globe has brought a number of issues to the fore among which gender equality and empowerment of women in the form of male - female differentiation constitutes the core of the gender – biased system.

Today, we often talk about women Empowerment. But still women Empowerment is seen in theory but not in practice. Women Empowerment floors way for the growth of a nation. If women are not permitted to empower and bring out their abilities due to male dominance and gender discrimination, development in India will be a slow progress. Women Empowerment can be endorsed through women’s participation in the social, economic and political activities. The empowerment process is one where women find time and space of their own and being to re-examine their lives critically and collectively. They enable women to look at old problems in new ways, analyse their environment and situation, recognise their strength, alter their self image, access new kinds of information and knowledge, acquire new skills and initiate action aimed at gaining greater control over resources of various kinds. In a way, the term empowerment is often used to describe a process whereby the powerless or dis – empowered people gain a greater share of control of resources and decision – making. So far as women empowerment is concerned it is about gaining autonomy and control over resources includes many dimensions such as economic social and political. In fact, women’s empowerment is a state of being that reflects a certain level of critical consciousness about external realities and an awareness about their internal thought construction and belief system that affect their well – being in terms of gender justice and social justice as well as determination to use their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to protect their lives.

Woman in India

“Women all over the world have a great role to play in bringing peace in the tension ridden world” --

Speech of late PM Rajiv Gandhi – Hindustan Times, March 1986.

A man without women is only half a man. Swami Vivekananda warned it is completely unfair to discriminate between sexes, as there is no sex distinction in a man (soul), the soul has either sex nor caste nor imperfection/ Vivekananda considered men and women as two wings of a bird and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. Swami Vivekananda noticed almost everywhere women are treated as playthings. According to Vivekananda, the ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood – that marvelous, unselfish, all suffering ever – forgiving mother. A common Indian proverb states “Raising girls is like watering someone else’s lawn”

Meaning of Empowerment

The term empowerment means to give somebody the power or authority to act” The empowerment means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day – to – day lives in the social, economic and political terms – a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. The main motive behind women empowerment is to protect their rights to enrich their quality of life and involve them in decision making process at all levels, particularly in those decisions which are related to their lives and families, To empower women politically, they were given equal rights to cast vote along with men in elected bodies, right from the village level to the Parliament. The term empowerment of women has become popular after 1980’s. It refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and as the process of providing equal rights opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

Objectives of the Empowerment of Women

Empowerment of women is recognised as an important end in itself, as well as a key to improving the quality of life of everyone. Without the full and equal participation of women, there can be no sustainable human development of a nation requires maximum possible utilisation of not only physical and natural resources but also human resources without any discrimination based on caste, creed, colour, religion and sex. According to Father of our nation M.K.Gandhiji,

“One step for women and ten steps to nations”. This implies the development of a nation can be achieved only through the development of women. However, empowerment is aimed at acquisition of the following object

- 1.High literacy level and education
- 2.Better health care for her and her children.
- 3.Equal ownership of productive resources.
- 4.Increased participation in economic and commercial sector,
- 5.Creating awareness of their rights.
- 6.Better standard of living.
- 7.Achieve self reliance, self- confidence and self respect among.

Concept of Empowerment

“Becoming powerful” the literal meaning of the term ‘empowerment is being used today in all spheres of life as process to strengthen the elements of society. Empowerment has gained significance to eliminate the gender disparity in India.⁸ The empowerment approach was first clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with women for a new Era. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women’s Conference at Nairobi in 1985. The conference defined empowerment as “A redistribution of social women. Empowerment which encompasses many aspects i.e. enhancing awareness, increasing access to resources of economic social and political etc.”

Empowerment of Women

In India, the central Government in its welfare Programmes shifted the concept of development to empowerment only in the Ninth plan (1997 – 2002) and observed the year 2001 as “Women Empowerment year”. According to Adams, empowerment is the means by which individuals, groups and communities take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. Dubhushi considered empowerment as exercising control over one’s lives, firstly on resources – financial, physical and human and secondly on beliefs, values and attitudes.

Empowerment is also the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. The goals of women’s empowerment and to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and institutions that rain force and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequalityand to enable poor woman to gain access to and control of both material and informational resources. It can change existing power relations by addressing itself to the three dimensions of material human and intellectual resources. Empowerment cannot occur as a revolution but only as an evolution.

Steps to Empower Women in India

Since Independence, Government has made concerted efforts towards, removing various gender biases to ensure that women enjoy equal status vis – a – vis men in the real sense as enshrined in the constitution of India. In pursuance of the principles laid down in the constitution, a series of legislative enactments have been passed at central and state levels to overcome a number of social disabilities particularly in the area of marriage and property rights. In India, the major efforts for improving the women have been through legislation.

Enactments passed for Women

The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 in the Imperial Legislative Council of India, fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. In 1949, after independence, it was amended to 15 for girls and in 1978 to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. It is popularly known as the Sharda Act after its sponsor Harbilas Sharda. It came into effect on 1 April 1980 and applied to all British India.

In 1955, Hindu Marriage Act was passed which abolished Polygamy for Hindus, allowed divorce to either husband or wife. Secular and mixed marriages were legalised by the Special Marriage Act of 1955. These Acts were followed by the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 providing that son, daughter and widow mother could inherit equally. Adoption and Maintenance Bill of 1956 provided separate maintenance for a woman under certain conditions where legal separation or divorce was not sought.

Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1976, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Immoral Traffic Act 1986, Commission of Sati, Act 1987, Pre – natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1992, 73rd and 74th Amendments in the constitution to provide reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities.

In 1985, Department of Women and Child Development, National Institute of Public co – operation and child Development, Central social welfare Board, Rashtriya Mahilakosh, National Commission for Women, The standing committee an “Empowerment of Women’ were set up. Policies like National plan of Action for Women 1976, National Perspective plan for women (1988 – 2000 A.D) Shram – Shakti – National Policy for the Empowerment of women, plan of Action to combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children were framed.

Conclusion

“To reconstruct Society and to
Create a hunger free India,
Empowerment of women is vital”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Today, women are developed in different fields. Education empowers women in the family. The decision of the educated women is accepted. Reservation is provided for them to participate in the

politics. The year 2001 was called as the “Empowerment of Women Year in India,” because the national policy for empowerment of women has been brought out the advancement and development.

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