

Empowerment of Women in India- An Attempt to Fill the Gender Gap (June, 2012)

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Abstract- The discriminated and exploited of women is seen all over the world. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Women play a very strategic role in the development of society in particular and development of economy in general. Woman is the leader planner of the family, the first trainer; supplier of labour power and by playing focal role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. Women contribute directly or indirectly for economic development. Though the nature has given the genetic power of reproduction especially to the women, the socio-economic status of women is so poor and the incidence of poverty is more on woman only. Empowering women is the only solution for all questions. Her potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, her status in the society must be improved and economically she should be strengthened. The poverty is the main cause for her low bargaining power hence poverty should be removed. Empowering women and removal of poverty go hand in hand. Woman if is educated and empowered, her potential power can be utilized for the economic development. Mahatma Gandhiji says, "You educate a man, you educate an individual. You educate a woman, you educate an entire family".

The paper contains need, objectives, methodology of the study, Better and Bitter conditions of Women, Need for Women Empowerment, Women Empowerment of India, Government Schemes of Empowerment, Conclusion, etc

Index Terms- Empowerment, Safeguarding, opportunity, development, potential

I. INTRODUCTION

The discriminated and exploited of women is seen all over the world. The empowerment is an support to help women to accomplish equal opportunity with men or to reduce the gap between men and women. Women play a very strategic role in the development of society in particular and development of economy in general. Woman is the leader planner of the family, the first trainer; supplier of labour and by playing focal role in the development of different sectors like agriculture, industry, service, etc. and she contributes for the creation of a enlightened society. Women contribute directly or indirectly for economic development. Though the nature has given the genetic power of reproduction especially to the women, the socio-economic status of women is so poor and the incidence of poverty is more on woman only. Empowering women is the only solution for all

questions. Her potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, her status in the society must be improved and economically she should be strengthened. The poverty is the main cause for her low bargaining power hence poverty should be removed. Empowering women and removal of poverty go hand in hand. Woman if is educated and empowered, her potential power can be utilized for the economic development. Mahatma Gandhiji says, "You educate a man, you educate an individual. You educate a woman, you educate an entire family".

Women make up 496 million (48 percent) of the India's population, comprise 127 million workers with 26 percent of work participation rate (31percent discriminated and exploited. India is not exception for this (as per 2001 census). The intensity of exploitation and subjugation varies from society to society. But there is no such a society which has eliminated the exploitation and subjugation. The patriarchal system has confined the women to specific areas such as kitchen and the bed room and fixed gender roles like bearing and rearing children, cooking and cleaning. Even today a woman is viewed as 'property' and not a human being who has her own likes and dislikes. Opportunities for self development are denied to them.

Need and Importance of the Study:

Women play an important role in all the fields of development. Socially economically if she is strengthened then she will create wonders. Women contribute directly and indirectly for the economic development. Though the nature has given the genetic power of reproduction especially to the women, the socio-economic status of women is so poor and the incidence of poverty is more on woman only. Empowering women is the only solution for all questions. Hence it is essential to study the past and present position of women and suggest measures for their upliftment.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has following objectives,

1. To study the scenario of status of women and efforts made in past and present,
2. To study the necessity of empowerment of women and
3. To know the available schemes for women empowerment in India.

III. METHODOLOGY:

For the preparation of this paper secondary data is used.
BETTER AND BITTER CONDITION OF WOMEN:

Women in Ancient India

The status of women is changing from time to time. The history of women in India has been exciting. Over the past few millennia, the status of women in India has been subject to many changes. Women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life in ancient days of India. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana point out that, women were educated in the early Vedic period. The Rigvedic verses tell that, the women married at a mature age and were free to select their life partner. Rig Veda and Upanishads, the holy books mention that, There were many women sages and seers, like Gari and Maitreyi. Stri. Dharma Paddhati, the text of Tryambakayajvan reflects the role of women and tells that, 'women were enjoined to be of service to their husbands'. In some kingdoms of ancient India, tradition like Nagar Vadhu i.e bride of the city was practiced. Amrapali was the famous Nagar Vadhu. Women were competing to win the popular title of the 'Nagar Vadhu'.

During the early Vedic Period women enjoyed equal position and rights. Later around 500 B.C the position of women started to decline with the Manusmiti and with the Mughal invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity cut the freedom and rights of women. Even though penitentiary movements like Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order by and large, the women in India faced captivity and restrictions. Around sixth century, the practice of child marriages started.

Medieval Period

During the medieval period, the position of Indian woman in the society further deteriorated. Among some communities in India, practice of Sati, Child Marriages and a ban on remarriages of widows became part of social life. The Muslim conquest brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. The Jauhar was practiced among the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The practices of temple women (Devadasi) was in practice and were sexually exploited in some parts of India. Among Hindu Kshatriya rulers polygamy was widely practiced. Women were restricted to Zenana areas in many Muslim families.

During and after British rule the condition of women is not very good. The women are not viewed with equal status. In India, woman herself doesn't feel equal and many times she ill treats herself.

IV. NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Women play a distinct role in the economic development. She is the chief architect of family, the first teacher; supplier of labour power and by playing main role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. In the visible and invisible form women contribute for economic development. The nature has given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women. She can create social, cultural and economic wonders. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. Often the women are victimized in the cases like rape, dowry harassments, sexual

harassments, kidnapping, female infanticides and sex selective abortions, domestic violence, trafficking, etc. The verdicts of many of such cases go against women because of the non-availability of witness, discontinuation of suits, difficulty of proving the incidents etc. Hence she should be strengthened and her status should be improved; she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of hidden potential power for the economic development. Therefore empower the women.

V. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

It is the man who has to take initiative for women empowerment. The efforts for the upliftment of conditions of Indian women have been noticed before and after British rule in India.

During British Rule

In the 19th century European scholars observed that, the Hindu women are naturally innocent, faithful and more virtuous than other women. During the British Rule, many reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule, etc. struggled for the upliftment of the conditions of women in India. The first free school for girls (Kalikrishna Girls' High School) in Barasat (Calcutta) was started by Peary Charan Sarkar, (student of Hindu College, Calcutta and a member of Young Bengal) in 1847. missionaries' wives like Martha Mault née Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell née Mault pioneered the education and training of girls in south India

In 1829, the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy resulted in the abolition of the practice of 'Sati' under Governor- General William Bentinck. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was the result of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's movement for the improvement in conditions of widows. The efforts of women reformer, Pandita Ramabai also helped for upliftment of conditions of women in India. The Indian National Congress supported the first women's delegation which met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights in 1917. In 1927, The All India Women's Education Conference was held at Pune. The efforts of Mahhommad Ali Jinna, resulted in passing of Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929. Mahatma Gandhi called upon the young men to marry the child widows and urged people to boycott child marriages.

Independent India

After independence India is free to take new and innovative steps for women empowerment. The Indian Constitution guarantees about, women equality, no discrimination, equality of opportunity, equal pay for equal work for all Indian women and it allows the State to make special provisions in favour of women and children, renounces practices insulting to the dignity of women and for provisions for securing just and humanitarian conditions of work and for maternity relief. The cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into prostitution, domestic work or child labour to prevent this, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956. In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act and the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed in 1985. In India all the medical tests that can be used to

decide the sex of the child have been banned. Female infanticide is still prevails in some areas. In India the abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the major reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides. During late 1970s the feminist activism got momentum and the protest due to the issue of rape of young girl Mathura in police station by a policeman compelled the government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists amalgamated the issues of female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy. The Government of India passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce) Act, on the base of Supreme Court Judgment in 1986. Women-oriented NGOs were formed with the help of grants from foreign donors in 1990s. Self Help Groups, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), etc. played a key role in protecting women's rights by which many women have emerged as leaders of local movements in India. In 1997, the Supreme Court of India in important judgment took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace and the Court laid down guidelines for the prevention and redressal of grievances. Subsequently the National Commission for Women elaborated these guidelines into a Code of Conduct for employers.

In 2001, the Government of India declared the year 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti) and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed. In 2005, the Hindu law of inheritance has been amended and now the women have been provided the same status as that of men have i.e right of having share in ancestral property. In 2006, the rape case of Imrana was highlighted, the announcement of some Muslim religious leader that, 'Imrana should marry her father-in-law' (the rapist) caused widespread protests and resulted in conviction verdict for 10 years imprisonment which was welcomed by many women's groups and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. On 26th October, 2006, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 has come into force. Rajyasabha passed Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring 33 percent reservation to women in Parliament and State Legislative bodies on 9th March, 2010. According to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Even though the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decision making positions.

VI. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The government of India has been trying to empower the women through various schemes some of schemes related to women empowerment in India are- Creches/ Day Care Centres for the children of working and Ailing mothers. Swayamsidh, Swa-Shakti Project, Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Swawalamban, Hostels for working women, Swadhar, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Self Help Groups (SHGs) etc.

VII. CONCLUSION:

The women play a strategic role in the society and in the economy. The status of women in India is not even in all the times. In ancient period they enjoyed equal status with men, in the medieval period, the position of Indian women deteriorated. During British rule and after independence many efforts are being made for improving the status of women in India. The government of India, by passing timely and essential Acts and implementing rules and regulations trying to empower and strengthen the women. No doubt the government of India has many weapons to fight for women empowerment, the prompt and strict implementation is quite essential. Unless the Acts, Policies, Rules, Regulations, etc. are strictly implemented the idea of women empowerment remains unachieved. Hence the efforts of the government are still inadequate and the process of empowering women in India is long way to go.

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