



THE DYNAMISM OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ERA; A CRITICAL EXPLORATION

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Abstract

It is important to note that since independence, discussions are going on for empowerment of women. Various policies and programmes were framed for the betterment of their status and enhancement but still the gaps needs to be bridge. There are various gender issues in the country and social perceptions surrounding these things are also booming. The status of women in society regarding the family, marriage, relationships etc. have been better off as compared to the traditional societies. The other aspect regarding the exploitation of women in various field needs to be considered. The study has also attempted to deal with the different forms and areas of exploitation which women are facing. Even the Government has deliberated the year 2001 as the year for Women Empowerment, it becomes important to look into the schemes and policies which are framed by the Government in India. Hence, it is required to analyse the situation of women through the secondary literature which will help in understanding the current scenario related to empowerment. The research will also suggest some policy recommendations for the betterment of the process of empowerment and the holistic growth and Development of the nation.

Keywords: Empowerment, Exploitation, Gender, National policy, Development.

Introduction

The condition of current society and traditional society is completely different as the time changes the rationalization among the people is increasing. Focusing about empowerment of women the situation of women has degraded and in the current scenario, the policies of the Government is trying to restore it back. The various incidents of Women's deprivation could be seen through the incidents which have happened in the traditional societies (Mahabharata and Ramayana). The post-colonial era have provided various freedom in terms of rights and protection through legalities to women. Even though there is domination of men and patriarchy in India, women has fought and struggled for their rights. The gendered segregations in the society is such that that the women are considered to be inferior then man. The values and norms are been ingrained in the society in such a manner that the process of socialization is conducted with all the gendered aspects. The public and private domain of socialization is being considered as most important form of inculcating standards and beliefs related to the upbringing of a child.

Even after many years of independence, the values related to certain gender are being transferred from one generation to the other generation without being inspected. The biological difference suddenly becomes the weaker side of a woman and then gets converted into the discrimination in various forms. The private parts of a women like uterus and breast has become the mode of discrimination and discrepancy in society. The reproductive capacities of women should not hinder the growth of her personal life. Looking from a perspective of radical feminist, it has been believed that women should say no to the reproductive rights (Vukoi i , 2017). When we talk about empowerment of women, it is not about one dimensional empowerment, providing them equity and equality with transparency in



authorization is the most important for development. The requirement is of providing them equal responsibilities and trusting them on all the fronts.

The public and private realms which women are into and the work load which she is experiencing based on the gender are increasing their burden. In the contemporary world these things are limiting them to perform the subordinate roles as compare to men. The problem is, society is still believing into the old notions from traditional era in which the women had responsibility of household chores. These philosophies are transferred from mother to daughter. In most of the feminist perspective also the nature is compared with women and is claimed that the nature is soft and reproducing hence, women are also engaged in the work of reproducing. Even, the cultural aspects and habits are ingrained in such a manner that this type of knowledge moves further (Bedoor AlShebli, Kinga Makovi and Talal Rahwan, 2020). Looking towards the social life of women, the historical society itself interprets that the *Manusmriti* poises that until the girl gets married she is the responsibility of father, once she gets married, she will be the responsibility of the husband and after the death of husband, she will be the responsibility of son/s, which automatically means that no independency has been given to the women. In the traditional society, some positive aspects of the women were also shown but rather the negative aspects gets more domination. The importance of women and womanhood is overpowered by the male counterpart. Generally, it is seen that to cheat the nature is easy, similarly to cheat women is also easy (Sharma, 2012). To support the patrilineity and patriarchy, women are also supporting each other. They are given more preferences and importance in the decision making if a woman gives birth to the sons rather than daughters as culturally, he is going to follow the customs of the family. Even the society is happier to celebrate the birth.

Looking towards the modern perspective, women have struggled a lot for their rights and laws. Declaration of Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen in 1791 has demanded the universal suffrage to, right to freedom, all- right to property, right to equality and so on. The known British feminist, Marry Wollstonecraft, who is also regarded as the grandmother of feminism has also questioned through her famous genre ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ (1792) regarding the rights of women about the rational education, political and social awareness which is required for all the women. She has promoted the rights of women through her masterpiece articles. Margaret Fuller, who was women’s right advocate, was also revolted against the professions where women were not allowed, she was encouraged women’s rights for employment and education (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Simon De Beauvoir (1908-1986), a French feminist known for his famous book ‘*The Second Sex*’, in which she has criticised the power of patriarchal society. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) in his book ‘*The Subjection of Women*’ (1869) stated that the life after marriage soon turned to the household work and slavery. There are various feminist like Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) who were considered as the feminist from new centuries (18th and 19th) and have criticised the religious institutions and norms of the society due to which the women have to face oppression. It is required to have an active participation from women.

In most of the primitive societies, it has been seen that the division of labour is based on the sex, but that does not mean that importance of women will be decreased. Comparing the contemporary era with the tribal society, most of the tribal societies are following the pattern of matriarchy. The cultural evolutionist claims that the society has evolved from the matriarchy to patriarchy. The culture is seen in the different stages, it is from simple to complex and hence the society has developed in the same



manner. There were many criticisms which were faced by patriarchy and the matrilineal society, but that pattern used to provide the equality to all the members of society (Banerjee, 2015). Social anthropologists like Margaret Mead (1949), in her study of Pacific Island Tribes have also found universal similarities in the sex roles of both the genders.

Strands of inequality and Disempowerment

Male is considered as the one of the powerful decision maker in private and public sphere. Hence, it could be said that the relationship between men and women are egalitarian in the society. This can also be seen in the various statistics of the country, even the literacy rate of the country is more in terms of male. It can be also proved from the census reports that the wages which are received by women are less as compared to men (2011 Census). India is seen in the context of geography also; hence the rural and urban areas were always given importance. The discrimination exists in both the areas. There are various dimensions of differentiations which can be listed out. It is said that the biological differentiation has been God-given, there is socio-cultural differentiation which is in terms of inferiority feeling for girls rather than boys, importance given to the household chores by girls and women needs to be considered as the reputation in society. The economic deprivation can be seen in the terms of unpaid work which a women is doing and inequality in the terms of wages and other services which needs to be provided to her. Along with all these things, political disempowerment can also be seen as the representation of women are very less into the political affairs at the local, national and international level. In India, there are mostly divorced, separated and single women are such who are facing problems because of the patriarchy society. The census also states that there are women headed households but most of them are deprived.

Looking at the feminization of poverty, the economic inequality in the country and other realms of discrimination has led to poverty cycle. According to the United Nations Commission of Women, “women are the world’s poor”. In most of the societies, it can be said that the women are most poor being (Christensen, 2019). The other processed which could lead to poverty are the informal sectors of the economy and the contractualisation of jobs. Because of the contractual jobs and the informal sectors women are facing severe discernment. Women are considered as an object and hence in extremely poor areas they are also pressurised to join the quagmire of prostitutes. The dignity and equality in the society is gone and slowly they are pushed in to the cycles of poverty. It is also very interesting to know that women lose their dignity in Indian society very quickly. Widow is not allowed to remarry quickly, there are still restrictions on the marriage of girl’s choice, various issues related to dowry system in the country, no acceptance to the live-in relationship and the bisexual women (Sharma, *The Dynamics of Women’s Empowerment: A Critical Appraisal*, 2017). Moreover, the power relations are also considered as one of the problem in Indian society. The reproduction and all the care giving which is related to it is generally termed as the conservation of the private property. There is no reproductive rights to women, she is controlled by her partner. This can be understood in a sense that vasectomy is more safer as compare to the tubectomy, as there are chances of complications to women but the male counterpart will not prefer to have that and women’s are forced to use the contraceptives and the other methods (Fasiha T. Abdul Aziz and Kruthi R, 2020). Men generally reluctant towards this procedures as there is loss of biological potency, which shows that there is gender biasness which is prevailing in this area as well. There are statistics which are showing the data of women using the contraceptive methods are more as compare to the men. Generally, women are treated as an object for family planning and hence they are forced to listen to the superiority in family (Soheila Ehsanpour, Maedeh



Mohammadifard, Shahla Shahidi and Nafise Sadat Nekouyi, 2010). Looking towards the other parameters, westernization in India is prompt and increasing.

The third problem which women faces in the Indian society is about the absence of women's ownership in the household and in the society as well. Women's less control over various things means that less power control. There are some improvements also in terms of economic condition of women. Looking from the technological perspective, the control from the west is increasing and slowly we are moving towards the reductionist approach. The capitalism and globalization of all the things is increasing by reducing the effects of communism. It could also be cited that the care giving economy of the women and the reproductive work which could be solely done by women has been reduced to certain extent (Whitney, 2008). Due to the commercialization of the health services in the country, the private hospitals have turned up and charging very high amount of money. It could be said that the medicalization of the body of women is increasing day by day. Along with that the institutionalization of the delivery services have made the formalization in the system. The government has also comes up with the several schemes like Rashtriya Swasth BimaYojna, in which the various financial packages were availed to the doctors and the patients who will go for the C-section. Women generally prefer these kinds of packages which will attract them to less labour pain and other added benefits. There are obvious pros and cons of technology. Undoubtedly, it could be accepted that the technological methods have helped many women to get rid of various health issues which were persisting earlier in the society. Increasing faith in modern science sometimes also becomes harmful. The science will solve all the problems of human beings is the wrong convention which should not be perceived (Diamond, 1963). The health situation in India is not that satisfying, health care system is facing tremendous pressure looking at the current situation of pandemic. In spite of implementation of various programmes there are certain loophole which needs to be look after.

Another issue the crime against women is also increasing. National Crime Records Bureau of India has segregated various types of crimes against women. In the year 2019, it is showing that the crime against women 35.55% and in 2018 it was 33.02% and in 2017 is was 31.4%. It could be noted that the crime is increasing throughout the years. The crime can also be categorised into the physical and mental abuse, which is a matter of concern. Various women are also facing the problems like depression, harassment in offices, physical torture and many more. This increasing crime against women reduces the active involvement in the public affairs which directly affects the empowerment process. It is always presumed that the men's role in the public and private realm is of the leader. The national organization for women also played a dynamic role in some of the communities in the rape crisis centres. Various social change movements also took place due to these kind of activities in the society. It is necessary to change the socialization of men which has been done by the agents. The male oriented organizational structure needs to be enhanced in a manner that a positivistic attitude towards the other gendered needs to be developed (Bonnie E. Carlson ; Alissa Pollitz Worden ;Michelle van Ryn ; Ronet Bachman, 2003). The most heinous crime against women is the rape. The value of women in front of society decreases automatically and things will lead to the change in the behaviour of the victim and after some time she might develop lots of psychological problems. There are various societal myths about rape which would lead to the self-doubt and self-blame. Some of the national studies have also been reported where the rapes are not reported because of the fear of the society and other external pressures (Linda M. Williams and Scott Walfield, 2015).



Draft of National Policy for women 2016

Empowerment of women is a multidisciplinary concept which needs to be envisaged in a manner that the perspective should be to increase the resources, choices and opportunities. To enhance these perspectives for women is very important and it needs to be understood that the challenges are increasing in the contemporary era. The societies have various paradoxical trends which could be seen, for example the feminization of agriculture and the gender entitlements are growing. It is necessary to create an environment in which the choices based approach should be followed and women can enjoy their rights at fullest. It is a need to formulate the new policies which could provide us a transformative shift and it will be easy for women to contribute into the development process. The objectives which have been mentioned in the National policy for women are all related to the transparency, accountability and the strengthening of the rights of women by eliminating all forms of discrimination against her. There are various operational strategies which need to be followed to have more gender effective organizational structures in the country. The ministry at the central and state level needs to work in collaboration with each other for better outcome and output. Even, the roles and responsibilities of the local governance institutes need to be enhanced. Participation and accountability of all the associations and organizations are required for better structural changes. The draft of the policy is also mentioning about the gender budgeting to promote the equality and equity in the society. The policy needs to be implemented at the earliest as it is going to provide the strength to the ministries of the central and state government to have more futuristic vision of the empowerment of women (National Policy for Women, 2016). Ministry of Women and Child Development is engaged in various schemes which could bring transformative actions in the society. Since independence, we are still talking about the empowerment at various levels, it means that discrimination is still persisting in the society and inspite of various policy amendments it is difficult to change the perspective of society towards women.

Policy Recommendations

Now a days, empowerment is also considered as the service delivery mechanism because it is a development process and various schemes are attached with it. Policy needs to be treated as the instrument of the government in which it could be promoted as the effective human resource. The capability of self-sustainability and the choices towards the disempowered group should be catered first. Women empowerment is the challenging step in which the quality of life of women can be increased to a certain extent. The feminization of poverty needs to be reduced so that the sustainable Development goals can be achieved. According to the UN Population Fund, an empowered woman has a strong awareness of self-worth. Women need to be empowered in the sense that she should be able to understand the gender inequality and can also propose various amendments to change the same thing. Designing the policies should have various dimensions like economic, Social and Decision making. The policies should be development oriented at the ground level. The implementation is necessary through a proper channel or a proper mode and hence, the institutions need to be involved into it which can bring the participation of the women. For example; implementation of the Self Help Groups could be one of the best decisions which has improved the financial framework and understanding of the women. Similarly for the social development and the decision making process, it is required that the thought process and the socialization of the society needs to be hampered and changed. Discriminations in the society are hampering the empowerment process of women. We require the cross cutting solutions for these kinds of problems. It requires for an interaction at the multiple levels and the pre conceived notions needs to be removed at the earliest. Educational development of women is a much identified and discussed topic all over the world. To some extent Government has also tried to achieve



several challenges and the percentage of women in the political and social sector have been increased. But in front of that there are several challenges which could be justified. The concept of empowerment of women should be connected to the human development and the happiness index as well so that the empowerment can be evaluated and it could be understood that what more needs to be done for this sector. It is very clear that the empowered women will also ensure the sustainable development of nation.

Wage related issues all over the world is a concern and it is one of the burning issue in the society. This type of inequality in the society will lead to the poverty circle and then against the discrimination for power will arise (Dr. Rashmi Rani Agnihotri and Dr. Malipatil, 2017). Many of the policy orientations point towards the root cause of the problem and that is the economic empowerment which can be solved through the equal wage policy in various countries. It is also said that the larger proportions of the women's work remains unpaid as most of the contributions are done as the household work. The question is the unpaid work of women needs to be reduced by supporting. The disproportionate share of the work is generally seen as the problem in the middle income group countries. The needs is to move for the secure work in the informal economy. The policy formulations should be done in a manner that the all the sectors of economy should include women as an integral part of it. Ground level participation is must but along with that they should be promoted at the all managerial levels. The extended help in terms of counselling, medical costs, training etc could be provided to all the women employees. There should be gender sensitization training on various issues and period leaves should be provided to her whenever required. All these aspects will definitely help the formulation of policies in such a manner that it would lead to the development of nation and could also strengthen the nation (H. Elizabeth Peters, Nan Marie Astone, Ammar A. Malik, Fenohasina Maret and Caroline Heller, 2016).

Conclusion

For the stable future and better development, the empowerment is required. A literate woman will never ever let her family illiterate. The family and the society should provide care and need to invest in the education, health and other finances. The sustainable social development is necessary to achieve empowerment of women. The seminars and discussions would might not help to change the current frame work which is existing. Some concrete steps needs to be taken to have a better sense of environment towards women. Talking about the past or the traditional society, it could be clearly protracted that in the society the women always have to struggle for their rights. They would might have not received any of the rights or opportunities without any of the movements. Hence, it could be said that the other gender has to fight and get things back because of the dominancy of one gender. There could be various institutional challenges also which needs to be countered. The service delivery mechanism, and the programmes of the government are one of the vital deliverables of empowerment. The mandatory variables of women empowerment should be taken seriously in the changing era of development.

To receive the rights for education and vote is not enough for growth and development. Opening up of various organizations for women is required but along with that the implementation of all the ground level policies are required. The stress which has been caused to women due to the overburden of the household chores needs to be reduced. A good initiative has been taken up by the think tank NITIAayog that recording and publishing the experiences of all the women entrepreneurs in different fields. These things will definitely help the public at large to come up with the positive thoughts about women. Moreover, the empowerment of the women should be linked up with the essential services



such as healthcare and education. Some of the studies have also mentioned that the decision making autonomy for women would lead to the better health of women. There is need for the multi-sectorial approaches that aim to increase women empowerment in the process. Women's rights can only be safeguarded where the individuality of the women and her representation is recognised. If a woman is in the distress, the development is difficult task. Gender development with the decentralised manner is required. The scope of social intervention is required to develop the strength and enable them at various fronts. The stakeholder of empowerment needs to be proper policy oriented and should be ready to invest in the various programmes and policies of government. The sustainable development of nation is a challenge but keeping women at each and every stage, the targets could be achieved easily.

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