



## Women empowerment

\*<sup>1</sup> Ulfat Rashid, <sup>2</sup> Dr. Rajshri Shastri

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology and Social Work Barkatullah University Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup> Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work IEHE Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interest in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. Women empowerment, referring to the empowerment of women in our present society, has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and economics. It can also point to approaches regarding other marginalized genders in a particular political or social context. Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women's empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. While as women's economic empowerment is the ability, for women to enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their women empowerment status and well-being. While often interchangeable used, the more comprehensive concepts of gender empowerment to people of any gender, stressing the distinction between biological sex and gender as a role. It there by also refers to other marginalized gender in a particular political or social context.

**Keywords:** women empowerment, economic status, political and social context

### Introduction

The term empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interest in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence and to recognize and use their resources. The term empowerment originates from American community psychology and is associated with the social scientist Julian Rappaport (1981) <sup>[1]</sup>. However, the roots of empowerment theory extend further into history and are linked to Marxist sociological theory. These sociological ideas have continued to be developed and refined through Neo-Marxist Theory (also known as critical Theory) <sup>[2]</sup>. In social work, empowerment forms a practical approach of resource-oriented intervention. In the field of citizenship education and democratic education, empowerment is seen as a tool to increase the responsibility of the citizen. In the field of citizenship education and democratic education is seen as a tool to increase the, empowerment responsibility of the citizen. Empowerment is a key concept in the discourse on promoting civic engagement. Empowerment is a concept, which is characterized by a move away from a deficit-oriented towards a more strength-oriented perception, can increasingly be found in management concepts, as well as in the areas of continuing education and self-help. Robert Adams points to the limitation of any single definition of 'empowerment' and the danger that academic or specialist definitions might take

away the word and the connected practices from the very people they are supposed to belong to <sup>[3]</sup>. Still, he offers a minimal definition of the term: Empowerment the capacity of individuals, groups and / communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives <sup>[4]</sup>.

Gender is a social construct that defines what it means to be a man or a woman in a given society. Gender often prescribes roles for men and women, dealing with division of labour, responsibilities and rights. These roles vary by culture and may change over time <sup>[5]</sup>. In societies, gender structures have the potential to produce institutionalized inequalities between men and women <sup>[6]</sup> (i.e. gender inequality).

In these contexts, women are often more susceptible to and are disproportionately affected by these inequalities <sup>[5]</sup>. (one approach to challenge gender inequality is through women gaining power through a process of women's empowerment is understood as transformatory in that it has the potential to challenge societal inequities, such as conditions rooted in gender inequality <sup>[7]</sup>. over the last couple decades, the international development community has increasingly focused its efforts on promoting gender equality as a means to better social, economic and health outcomes, United Nations headquarters in New York to develop goals to reduce poverty by 2015. These eight goals known as the Millennium Development Goals, guide international development actor on strategy and project goals. Goal three is to "promote gender equality and empower women. Additionally, in 2010, the United National Development Funds for Women (UNIFEM)

was re-branded as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of women (UN Women). The intention behind this was to make the organization a more independent and well-resourced agency. The World Bank is also an advocate for women's empowerment. In their Gender Action Plan, women's economic empowerment is prioritized as a main objective and has included in over 1,800 World Bank-aided projects [6]. The World Bank asserts that investing in women unleashes economic potential and is good for economic growth and poverty reduction. Women's empowerment is promoted for economic rationales as well as a means to achieve positive health outcomes for women and children. Demographers have noted that changes in gender system, such as women's empowerment, can bring about demographic change, specifically with regards to fertility.

The concept of empowerment is not specific to women, yet it is unique in that and it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households [8].

Rappaport's (1984) definition includes: "Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives." According to Stewart in order to guarantee a successful work environment, managers need to exercise the "right kind of authority". To summarize, "empowerment is simply the effective use of a manager's authority", and subsequently, it is a productive way to maximize all-around work efficiency. While as women's economic empowerment is the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well-being.

Women's political participation is one of the important issues in the context of empowerment. In conventional analysis it means activities related to electoral politics like voting, campaigning, holding party office and contesting election. But in broader sense it encompasses all voluntary actions intended to influence the making of public policies, the administration of public affairs and the choice of political leaders at all levels of government. Political interventions by women of India today range from movement for peace and good governance to protest against dowry, rape, domestic violence, food adulteration, price rise etc [9].

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- Freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- To make their own choices and decisions
- Have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- Have equal social status in society
- Have equal rights for social and economic justice
- Determine financial and economic choices
- Get equal opportunity for education
- Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias
- Get safe and comfortable working environment.

### **Origin of Women Empowerment**

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movements in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation, and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justices to advantaged groups of people. At the former end of the continuum, where empowerment is defined largely as an individual process, empowerment can be used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security. Instead, the argument makes individuals and communities responsible for their own social security and welfare, without providing the necessary. The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organization, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself.

### **Steps Undertaken in India for Women Empowerment**

The constitution Framers were very much conscious of the problem of women empowerment hence they ensured that the Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. The various articles mentioned in the earlier paragraphs are meant for ensuring gender equality. Moreover the constitution also empowers the states to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The real impetus for this movement was gained when under the Priministership of Mrs. Inder Gandhi, a scheme known as Inder Mahila Yojana was launched, UNDP also incorporated issue of women upliftment as Primary objectives. Various Schemes were later on launched for the empowerment of women such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Self-help groups at Panchayat level and many more. The establishment of National Women's Commission and State Women's commissions were important milestones in the direction of Women Empowerment in India. The National Policy for the Empowerment women (2001) was an important step taken by the Government of the for accelerating the pace of women empowerment. The policy was aimed at ensuring women empowerment through positive economic and social policies assured equal access to women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economic life of the nation. The National Policy also aims at strengthening legal system for eliminating discrimination against Women. It also visualizes strengthening partnership with Civil Society, particularly Women's organizations. States have also taken various measures for empowerment of women.

### **Need For Women Empowerment**

In spite of the various measures taken up by the government after Independence and even during British rule the Women haven't been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in

India occupying highest offices President, prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition or women like Ms. Chandra Kochar occupying highest positions in the Corporate Sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women. The female foeticide is not an uncommon phenomenon. The male female ratio though improved over last few years is still far from satisfactory. It is 940 women per 1000 men for India in some states it is as much lower as 877. These are the states where female foeticide is maximum. The female literacy rate is also lower than the male literacy rate. The ground reality is deprivation, degradation and exploitation of women specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sectors of the society. The Urban elite class women have no doubt been benefitted by the efforts of women empowerment. Dr. Dashrat Bhuyan in his article titled "Empowerment of Indian women; A challenge of 21<sup>st</sup> century" writes "women are being brutalized, commodified, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination" In spite of reservation being granted to women in Panchayat elections after 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitution amendment, in many Panchayats the male chauvinism does not allow them to function independently.

### **Globalization**

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of women and child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.

### **Social Empowerment of women**

A programme for checking the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV /AIDS and infection / communicable diseases like T.B. need to be launched. Women face high risk of malnutrition hence focussed attention would have to be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life cycle. The problem in the country is serious about the women belonging to disadvantaged groups. They are the most exploited lot. The social activist should keep a vigil on the atrocities committed on women belonging to weaker sections and help them to fight the legal battle for obtaining justice. Schemes need to be introduced for helping women who are victims of marital violence, who are deserted and those engaged in sex professions. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. Government has to be vigilant for ensuring that there is no discrimination against the girl child and her rights are

protected. The social stigma like child marriage. Female foeticide, child abuse and child prostitution must be eradicated immediately. Education and Women Empowerment Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates. The incidence like early marriage, female foeticides and infanticide, dowry, bride burning, rape, molestation, kidnapping etc are very frequent. The record of crime against women indicates an increasing trend<sup>[10]</sup>. The position of women in the country in the social, economic and political fields is by no means equal to that of their male counterparts. Besides low female literacy, there are many other factors that have contributed to gender biasness. Girl child is still given less priority in certain parts of India. Past indicate that it is the people's perception in general that the birth of a girl child is less desirable and evokes less happiness than that of a boy child<sup>[11]</sup>. It is ingrained in the Indian psyche, cutting across religion, caste and region. Since her birth she is victimized in all spheres including education, employment, nutrition and social status. The National Population Policy 2000 specifically identified the low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of goals towards maternal and child welfare<sup>[12]</sup>. Under the social empowerment of women steps needs to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities.

### **Role of NGO'S in Women Empowerment**

Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations/NGO have gained increased attention in the field from grass-root level to national and international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGO's is open, transparent and personal. So, they are more effective in this direction. They organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the awakening of the masses. Their mass appeal-style contributes to a better understanding of women's rights and of the means to ensure the enjoyment of those rights and the elimination of discrimination. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self - employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

### **Role of International Agencies for Women Empowerment**

Promotion of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women is central to the work of United Nations. The UN actively promotes women's human rights and works to eradicate, discourage of violence against women, including in armed conflict through trafficking. There are various UN agencies working for the empowerment of women like The Commission on the Status of women, The Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, The

Division for the advancement of women, The United Nations development funds for women, and recently, the UN women association is formed which co-ordinates the activities of all the former UN agencies. These international agencies work to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society. So they can participate equality with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

### Conclusion

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century not only at national level but also at the international, level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure gender equality but Government initiative alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in the social, political and Economic life of the country with a scene of equality. Wherever women is respected, God resides there) would come true. According to literature the women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men. In spite of so many efforts undertaken by government and NGOs the picture at present is not satisfactory. Mere access to education and employment can only help in the process of empowerment.

### Reference

1. Rappaport, Julian. In praise of paradox. A social policy of empowerment over prevention, in: American Journal of Community Psychology. 1981; 9(1):1-25.
2. Jump up ^ Burton & Kagan Rethinking empowerment: shared action against powerlessness, 1996. <http://www.compsy.org.uk>. Archived from the original on |archive-url- requires |archive-date- (help). Retrieved 1 November 2017. External link in |website- (help).
3. Adams, Robert. Empowerment, participation and social work. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 6.
4. Jump up ^ Adams, Robert. Empowerment, participation and social work. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 6.
5. Alleman P. What Difference Does Gender Make, 2010.
6. Mason KO. International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Gender and demographic change: What do we know? IUSSP, 1995.
7. Kabeer N. Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change. 1999; 30(3):435-464.
8. Malhotra A, Schuler SR, Boender C. Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development, 2002. Unpublished Paper for the World Bank. [www.unicef.org/pubsgen/humanrights-children/index.html](http://www.unicef.org/pubsgen/humanrights-children/index.html) Visited on 11th January, 2008, at 5 p.m.
9. Desai N, Thakkar U. Women and Political Participation in India, Women in Indian Society, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 2007.
10. Sharma BR, Gupta M. Gender Based Violence in India – A Never-ending Phenomenon, Journal of International Women's Studies. 2004; 6(1):113-122.
11. Seth, Mira. Women and Development- The Indian Experience", Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2001.
12. GOI. National Population Policy, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, 2000.