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**AN ANALYSIS UPON THE SOCIOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN
INDIA: A BRIEF DISCUSSION**

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An Analysis upon the Sociological Perspectives of Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion

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Abstract – Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century(national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. In this regard, we my mentioned the name of the British people.

After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social position of women with men. Today we have seen the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some discrimination and harassment of the society. A few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, each and every should be careful to promote the women statuses.

Every day in our life start with the word change, from beginning of the day we start with the discussion of what was the situation in past one year, one decade, or in past twenty five years. How things have changed whether values, customs, mores, norms, religion, culture, tradition, believes so on and so forth. Without doubt change has left no corner of society and human life. Women are no exception to change. We find that if we start to write about the life of women there will be shortage of ink and paper. One interesting thing is that in each corner of globe where we find human habitation there women status is next to men, in almost all culture and community. This fact itself has become law of nature.

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INTRODUCTION

The strength of chain is the strength of its weakest link. In a society, women are the weakest links, so that they may be strengthened for strengthening the society as a whole and that is possible only by empowering them. Nehru said, "Women should be uplifted for the upliftment of the nation, if a women is uplifted, society and nation is uplifted." Women empowerment is critical to the process of development of the community. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the mainstream of economic development. According to Swami Vivekanand, "..... there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing (Yojana, Aug. 2001). Women have to play an important role in the building up of every economy. Women who form almost one half of the world's population constitute the visible majority of the poor. Women either solely or largely support an increasing number of families. Women experience poverty more than man. When money is given to men, it may not benefit the family but when women manage money, it is found to be better utilized. Projects aiming to

improve the living conditions of the poor cannot, therefore be effective unless women participate in their formulation and implementation as contributors as well as beneficiaries. "Increasing women's capabilities and empowering them is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development."

In India, apart from the provision in the constitution and the ratification of different international connections, several legislative acts have also been passed to ensure women empowerment. Moreover, women empowerment has received attention of the government right from the beginning of Indian planning.

Bringing women into the mainstream of development has thus been major concern of the government since independence. In order to empower and bring them into the mainstream, an enabling environment with requisite policies and programmes, institutional mechanisms at various levels and adequate financial resources has all along been tried to be created. The Ministry of Rural Area and Employment has special components for women in all its programmes and

certain amount of funds is earmarked as women's component to ensure a flow of adequate resource for women.

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

"Change" refers to any deviation from accepted way of life or established lives. Social change is the change in society at large. Society has been defined by MacIver as "web of social relationships". Change which has occurred in these social relationships is social change. Thus whatever perceptible alterations or modifications taking place in the mutual behavior between individuals is the sign of social change. Since society is a process not product. If it had been product then there would not have been changes. Processes are ongoing change therefore they bound to change. Society is changeable and dynamic, it can never remain static. We can say that change is a law of society unchanging society is a myth.

Women have been key agents of social change as well, and because of social change there is tremendous change in the lives of women. These women are not only the beneficiaries of change they are the key agents for change. Throughout India's long struggle for independence, women stood shoulder to shoulder with men. The Freedom Movement was their (women) movement, and the battles were their(women) battles. In fact, it was a woman- Rani of Jhansi who fired the first shot that began the freedom struggle in 1857.

While the women of India worked, fought and died for freedom, few have been able to share the fruits of that freedom. They remain subjugated, marginalized and disenfranchised, as they have been throughout history. Today, their struggle for bringing change is again the nation's struggle. Freedom for India's women means freedom for India to create a new future.

After Independence, the government of India undertook a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interest of women. Some of them may be noted as the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Special Marriage Act 1954, the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act-1956, The medical termination of Pregnancy Act-1971, The criminal Law Amendment Act-1983, the Family Court Act-1984, the Indecent Representation of women Act-1986, The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment

Acts-1993. These all are the Acts for women to equally entitle Individual freedom, fundamental rights including social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political activity participation. The constitution makers and the national leaders realized the equal social status of men and women for the better development of the society. Hence, bringing about more and more legislations to ensure better opportunities to grant more right and concession is of no benefit unless there is a basic change in the people's attitude towards women and women's role in society.

The year 1975 was observed as "International year of Women" as per the call of the UNO. From 1975 onwards, the 8th day of March is being observed as "International women's Day." The year 1990 was observed as "SAARC year of The Girl Child." The Government of India declared the year 2001 as the "Year of women's empowerment." These declarations prescribed for all-round development of women in India as well as in the world.

Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. It helps in reducing inequalities and functions as a means for improving their status within the family. Education of women in India has also been a major issue for both the government and civil society as the educational women play a very important role in the development of the country. So we cannot neglect the importance of education in the reference to women empowerment in India.

Social scientists and development practitioners have long been interested in the conditions that empower women. As the evidence that gender equality is important for economic growth, poverty reduction and enhanced human well-being has grown, interest in the determinants and correlates of women's empowerment has also grown.¹ Unfortunately, confusion over the definition and measurement of this concept remains widespread. Indeed, the tradition that measures women's empowerment by their years of schooling, employment experience or age at marriage remains alive, even if increasingly called into question on both conceptual and empirical grounds.

There is a particularly place to Indian women in society. When study indulges sociological approach called as sociological perspectives. In current scenario, sociological perspective is depending on the scientific base. Sociological study of women shows the reflection in Indian society. Women are the backbone of society. Society never complete without women. Men and women are the two wheels of the life. There should be uniformity in both parties. But when we see the structure of Indian society, it always gives the secondary status to the women. As per the development of education, the changes have been taking place in the position of women.

In this contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. Now, it is time to forget that men are the only holders of power. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. Now a day's women are coming the main stream of development. The government of India established a special commission for the women development i s. women commission in India.

WOMEN IN INDIA

Now the women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions. First, gender inequality in India can be traced back to the historic days of Mahabharata when Draupadi was put on the dice by her husband as a commodity. History is a witness that a woman was made to dance both in private and public places to please the man. Secondly, in Indian society, a female was always dependent on male members of the family even last few years ago. Thirdly, a female was not allow to speak with loud voice in the presence of elder members of her inlaws. In the family, every faults had gone to her and responsible. Forth, as a widow her dependence on a male member of the family still more increase. In many social activities she is not permitted to mix with other members of the family. Other hand, she has very little share in political, social and economic life of the society.

The early twenty century, it was rise of the National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who was in favor of removing all the disabilities of women. At the same time, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and various other social reformers laid stress on women's education, prevention of child marriage, withdrawals of evil practice of sati, removal of polygamy etc. The National Movement and various reform movements paved the way for their liberations from the social evils and religious taboos. In this context, we may write about the Act of Sati (abolish) 1829, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act' 1856, the Child Restriction Act, 1929, Women Property Right Act, 1937 etc.

After independence of India, the constitution makers and the national leaders recognized the equal social position of women with men. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 has determined the age for marriage, provided for monogamy and guardianship of the mother and permitted the dissolution of marriage under specific circumstances.

Under the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, an unmarried women, widow or divorce of sound mind can also take child in adoption. Similarly, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 says that any person

who gives, takes, or abets the giving or taking of dowry shall be punished with imprisonment, which may extend to six months or fine up to Rs.5000/ or with both. The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sexes and in fact grants special favors to women. These can be found in three articles of the constitution. Article 14 says that the government shall not deny to any person equality before law or equal protection of the law. Article 15 declares that government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex. Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the state to make affirmative discriminations in favor of women. Article 42 directs the state to make provision for ensuring just and human conditions of work and maternity relief. Above all, the constitution regards a fundamental duty on every citizen through Articles 15 (A), (E) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD-1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that for reservation of seats (33%), whereas the report HRD as March 2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweeden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Findland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India "The New Panchayati Raj " is the part of the effort to empower women at least at the village level.

The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. These are CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. The year of 2001 was observed as the year of women's empowerment. During the year, a landmark document has been adopted, ' the National Policy for the empowerment of women.' For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IMF) etc.

The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there are total 20, 56, 882 laces Gaon panchayat members, out of this women members is 8, 38, 244 (40.48%), while total Anchalik panchayat members is 1, 09, 324, out of this women members is 47, 455, (40.41%) and total Zila porisod members is 11, 708, out of this women members is 4, 923 (42.05%). At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc.

The most notable amongst these are Mrs.protiva Devi Singh Patil, Shila Dexit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Binda karat, Nazma Heptulla, Indira Nuye (pepsi-co), BJP leader Susma Soraj, railway minister Momta Benarji, 'Narmada Basao' leader Medhapatekar, Indiand Iron Woman, EX-prime minister Idira Gandhi etc. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-none of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Gandhiji said that women are the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minute detail of the activities of life and she has a right of freedom and liberty with man. But today in India with special reference to the villages, we see that by sheer force of a viscous systems even the most ignorant and worthless man have been enjoying a superiority over women which do not deserve and ought not to have. We can however, see that the trends have changed to a great extent with more and more women coming out and competing with men in many spheres. We can see today women and all spheres of life with no exception.

Constitutionally and legal, man and women are equal. In real practice, however, women still finds a secondary place. Example of inequalities galore in respect of women-men birth rate, education and participation in matters of financial and political. Atrocities are perpetrated on women. She is viewed not as a human being bit a delectable thing.

Efforts are being made to change this situation and bring about a stage where man and women be viewed equally. Many schemes are being implemented for equal education and equal opportunities of employment so that, women would have equal rights. Consequently, there is seen some progress in this

regard. As the women has now increased presence in banks, gram panchayats, various government sectors etc. her social status is seen somewhat increased. However, this process is slow to get a boost to this process, mindset of the society as a whole should change.

The social empowerment means that the women should get an important place in her family and society and should have a right to enable her to make use of available resources. The member of SHGs are mostly women. They save money and invest in SHG. They can use it at the time of their needs. As they can have in their hand, they get some status in her family. It has resulted in developing self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect.

SOCIAL CHANGE OF WOMEN

Social Change through Education-

Education is a powerful aspect in modernization of Indian society. Education is the only institution which gives women equal status, equal rights and equal opportunities etc. In preindependent India education was restricted to males of upper strata, in the sense, male members of the Brahmin community.

Even the Brahmin females were deprived of the opportunity of education. At present the change of scenario can be seen. When girl child take birth the members of the society suggest the parent to provide her with, level best education. That is why even the government facilitating the parents of girl child with bhagya laxmi scheme, mid-day meals provision of free books and uniform etc, now people are more interested to give education to their female children also.

Because of various governmental initiatives female literacy rate is increasing decade by decade but still it is less than male literacy rate. Kerala and Mizoram are first and second states to have highest female literacy rate. We find improvement in social and economic status of women in these two states because of education.

Education in India has achieved amazing success during the last fifty- five years. Its achievements, both in absolute and relative terms, have been remarkable. The fact becomes more visible when we compare the present situation with the one existing at the time of independence. After independence, it was recognized that education formed a vital aspect of the modernization processes.

Social Change through Empowerment-

The word 'empowerment' itself signifies the presence of 'power'. Women empowerment is nothing but enhancement of their position in power structure of the society⁸. This is the most important concept which brings about change in the womenfolk. Women as an

individual is said to be empowered when she has the right and ability to make and influence decisions. She may be economically, socially, or politically empowered. It is necessary that women be politically empowered for the holistic development of nation. Political empowerment of women has been defined by Datta as the "acquisition of the capacity as well as the adoption of needed strategy by women in order to exercise their powers more effectively and professionally, for their own development in particular and of the society in general".

Social Change through Employment-

When it comes to the matter of employment of women, most of them get employment in the unorganized/informal sector. The reasons behind this, is that their work is invisible and unpaid in household. When women do house hold work it is considered that she is not doing any extraordinary work but her duty for which she is the most suitable one. Contrary to this men work is considered as hard work which is dedicated for the family.

Because of patriarchal followings women suffer from inequality which is reflected in tasks assigned to them and lower wages paid to them. Addition to this there is a lack of support in services such as hostels, crèches, maternity services etc. Illiteracy and close pregnancies further aggravate their position as employees along with this the several exploitation and vulnerability from which they suffer which made them unequal partners in the employment market and accordingly in economic development.

This also because of absence of awareness about social legislation, Low economic status, lacuna and disparities in the personal laws governing marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance etc., have contributed to the lower status of women in Indian society. Coupled with this is the gender bias arising out of the patriarchal system which makes their position still worse, girls are discriminated against in terms of health, malnutrition, secretion and education inputs. This has resulted in lower education, health and nutritional standards among girls, with the result that women are not only deprived of development inputs but this also, retards their active participation in development.

Social Change through Politics-

Modern Indian women can be seen enjoying the high offices such as President, Prime Minister, speaker in loksabha and leader of the opposition. But in Indian history we do not find that women have been given a respectable administrative or political position. Even today when we look into the women's participation in politics, the number of women politician is much more less than compared to the number of men politician.

This is because of lower percentage of participation in voting, in public administration and in public debate and lack of supporting atmosphere in political sphere. Significant changes occurred in the social, economic and political status of women during the 19th century in India.

The women who are in politics they belong to the urban elite group. The poorer women are restricted to domestic life. There is also an irony that higher percentage voting women belong to the rural and poor background, when compared to the percentage urban and educated background women are less.

CONCLUSION

For Empowerment of Women in every society must change their attitude, behavior in positive trend and essential to create congenial environment towards the women and to recognize their rightful place in the decision-making process. Women should have greater autonomy in decision-making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed by prevailing customs, beliefs and practices. They should become active members in development process rather than mere beneficiaries of programs and services. Women must be provided opportunities to have control over production resources that would lead to better life for their families and their children. Women mostly working in groups there are need to organize women's societies for various activities involving group engagement a strong and effective women cooperative movement is desirable to boost economic development process of rural women and families. Women should not only be financial supporter but should also play the role of decision making process of the family. To solve the problems of women empowerment the attitude of the male dominant society should be changed. Both the State and Central Government have to play a vital role in the process of policy frame and execution.

Women are making a difference against all odds; women are there in Panchayati raj. There is change in the outlook of women in contemporary Indian society. Variety of factors such as modern education, high geographical and occupational mobility and most importantly emergence in the new economic patterns are responsible for making women acquire a new status and a new social stature. Thus, the social change for women in a positive manner is the need of the hour.

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