

## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH VARIOUS STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

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### ABSTRACT

Dependent women are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. The term covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines ranging from psychology and philosophy to the highly commercialized self-help industry and motivational sciences. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of ones lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). (Baltiwalla, 1994). It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Pinto, 2001). The present paper focus on health and safty methods of women , strategies of empowering daily women and polices taken by the government to empowering women.

**(key words:** women, empowerment, work, strategies)

**INTRODUCTION:** There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. "It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing," said Swami Vivekananda. But through centuries, societies in the world over have been trying to fly on only one wing, denying women their rightful place. The greatest champions of women's rights have been great men like Gandhiji, Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar, Maharshi Karve and ironically those who have systematically exploited and degraded them have also been of a largely-male dominated society. The very concept of women

empowerment shows that society as such has given a raw deal to women – who comprise nearly fifty percent of the population and women themselves have to come forward to fight for their rightful place in all walks of life and prevent their exploitation in every field. Women, who number 498.7 million according to the 2001 census of India, represent 48.2 percent of the country's population of 1,027.01 million. Let us analyse the ways and means for empowerment of women.

**CONCE CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:** Women's empowerment is very essential for the

development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

### **NEED FOR THE STUDY:**

Empowering Women aims to inspire women with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting belief patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to see their true beauty and power. There is a pertinent need to empower women and the competitiveness of the country depend on the capability of its women who constitute more than half of the Indian population. This enormous contribution to the country will greatly heighten the country's advancement.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The objective of the study is to examine the various strategies to develop the women empowerment and also to study the policies that are taken by the government to empower the women in the society .

### **SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION:**

There are two types of data collection methods i.e primary data and secondary data. The present data have been collected totally from secondary data such as different journals, research studies and books.

### **HEALTH AND SAFE MOTHERHOOD:**

Women's health is another important issue under Human Resource Development and also highest prioritized area in family welfare programs. However, the accumulated research evidences show that the achievement levels in providing better health care and safe motherhood for women, especially for rural women, are not at expected levels. In India, the highest number of deaths in the age group of 16 to 25 is recorded among women. Anaemia is one of the most commonly found deficiency among the women and it is also mentioned by several studies that they are often not too healthy when they bear the first child and none of them are physically ready to bear a second child. A pathetic reality is that nearly 88 percent of the pregnant women (1985-95) reported to be anaemic. World Health Organization figures also show that the lifetime risk of dying from pregnancy or child-birth-related causes is one in twenty in some developing countries, compared to one in ten thousand in some industrialized

countries. About one in five of these deaths stem from unsafe abortions. The available data says that in India about 20 percent of the women in the age group of 15-49 years are at the risk of unintended pregnancy. Coming to anti-natal care only 10 percent of the pregnant women receive it on an average in rural India. In this regard Tamil Nadu, Himanchal Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, West Bengal is in better position than other states. Nearly 33 percent of the babies are under low birth weight category. During 1993, 5.5 percent stillbirths are recorded at all India level and this percentage is more in Bihar and West Bengal (around 15%). The reasons for such high percentage of stillbirths are usually associated with low age of mother, poor nutritional level of women and low utilization of primary health care. Women are particularly vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), including AIDS and their bodies are also at risk of being infected with HIV in the womb. In this area statistical information is not available. However, World Health Organization report says that during 1997 there were about 4,100,000 people in India found to be infected with HIV. Out of this total experts are assuming that 50 percent will be women. However, with World Bank/World Health Organization aid several special programs were initiated to create awareness about this dreadful disease the achievement is said to be at below minimum level.

## **STRATEGIES OF EMPOWERING DALIT WOMEN:**

Empowerment of the Dalit women is a means to poverty alleviation. The goals of

poverty eradication can be effectively achieved if Dalit women could be organized into groups for community participation as well as for assertion of their rights. Any strategy of sustainable development relating to poverty eradication has to involve the large number of poor women. Social mobilization and building organization of the poor are essential prerequisites for poverty alleviation. There are several strategies, which enable overall development of Dalit women. The following strategies were found more effective for overall development.

### **A. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH DWCRA/SHG APPROACH :**

Women's empowerment is used to alleviate poverty and other socio-economic issues. Self -Help movement through thrift and savings has been taken of as a mass movement under the government program of development of women and children in the Rural Areas (DWCRA), some of the State Governments assisted these self- help groups by providing revolving fund and helping them in micro- enterprise activities. DWCRA program of self-help groups helped the women to earn additional income. With improvement in economic status, there is enhancement in social status as well. These women show increased awareness of family welfare, promote their children's nutritional and educational status, shows concern about environment and health, issues of sanitation and drinking water.

## **B. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING :**

The Non-Government Organization (NGOs) plays a significant role in the area of education. To large extent the NGO activities have been confined to non-formal education sector. Now a partnership is emerging between the NGOs in the area of basic education as seen in the model of Lok Jumbish, a government-sponsored project for primary education in Rajasthan. Various NGOs are participating in the formal education sector, for example, Action Aid, Plan International, Aga Khan Foundation etc. NGO action in primary education emphasizes delivery system of quality education to the marginalized people like, poor women and girls. Programs of formal and non-formal education are emphasized by the government in collaboration with local NGOs and the communities. The NGOs use the strategy of popular education in spreading knowledge among people. This is seen in people's participation in developing "IEC" (Information, Education and Communication) package of spreading knowledge about HIV/AIDS, health promotion, environmental risks, etc. In the popular education, cultural forms of education are used like, drama, music, stories, etc. Popular education is effective in increasing awareness towards various social issues like, immunization, girls' education, sexual harassment, etc. Popular education can be applied anywhere, adapting to local context, the ideology and culture of the people with in the existing political system.

Thus, the NGOs can play a significant role in empowering women through education and training and it is also the basis in the strategy of women's participation in political field.

## **C .POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT :**

Women are poorly represented at different levels of political life and decision-making. Thus, there is widespread neglect of women's priorities by politicians and bureaucrats. As per the Human Development Report, 1999 women hold only 12.7 percent of the world's parliamentary seats and only 8.7 percent of those in the least developed countries. In India, the process of politically empowering through reservation in the local bodies has helped in the wider mobilization. On many occasions, elected women have provided the leadership for organizing women and get their legitimate demands fulfilled like, widow pensions, gas connections, etc.

## **GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

### **A. RESERVATIONS :**

The policy of reservations has helped mostly those who are now in the higher income groups; but only less than 5 percent in rural areas got jobs through reservations (Selvanathan, 1989). Data from Tamil Nadu show that the Scheduled Castes Hindus are somewhat better represented in the higher occupational categories compared to the Scheduled Castes Christians. This might be because of the reservations policy that benefits Hindus and not Christian Scheduled Castes (Balakrishnan, 1993). Unfortunately,

implementation of reservation policies has so far not been fully satisfactory (Vijayendré & Pradeep, 1982). Scheduled Castes are conscious of the ineffectiveness of the policies of protective discrimination of the government, since the advance of Scheduled Castes is often blocked by stubborn social forces. The civil rights enforcement cell that is expected to look into the non-implementation of reservations and economic deprivations of the Scheduled Castes is more a laughing stock than a helpful agency as it has no power to investigate and proceeds further (Khan, 1993).

## B. CONCESSIONS:

To enable the Scheduled Castes to secure professional jobs, a number of concessions are given to them: some of these are, relaxation in age, payable fee, standard of suitability, experience and qualification (Brochure, 1988), Chitnis (1986) suggests that social class considerations and vested interests seem to operate imperceptibly in the manner in which requirement for the several occupational positions available in society are defined. Requirements are not defined purely in terms of knowledge or skill required. Expectations regarding "suitable" manners, bearing, behaviour, values, style of life, and functioning are subtly involved in such a manner that the nexus between social class/family background and occupational placement is retained. Hence, one of the relaxations of rules for jobs is that Scheduled Castes be interviewed separately to ensure that they are not judged in comparison with other general candidates (Rozika, 1982).

## C. SOCIAL LEGISLATION:

The various laws were enacted to raise the social status of women have failed to remove social prejudices and social inequalities. In India, laws are violated with impunity without fear of any deterrent action or social disapproval. Everyday we read in the newspaper about dowry deaths, rape, abduction, trafficking of women, sexual harassment at work place and eve testing in buses and streets. Pattern of crime rates of 1999 over 1998 shows a slight drop in dowry deaths from 6975 to 6696, but much of these cases go unreported (NCRB 1998-99). Half the number of women in India is killed in their bedrooms or one woman is killed every 102 minutes in the name of dowry. In India, 6000-dowry murders are committed each year. This really exists even though the dowry prohibition act has been in existence for 41 years and there are virtually no arrests under the act. In India, Indian Penal Code sections 354 (Criminal assault of women to outrage women's modesty) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of woman) provide relief to victims of sexual harassment. Still, with the interpretation largely left to the discretion of the police officer, women groups have since the early 1980's voiced their protest against the malice. The Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill 2007 is designed to defend women against sexual abuse.

**CONCLUSION:** The concept of empowerment of women means psychological sense of personal control in the persons, domestic, social and politica



l realms. It is a process by which one is authorized to think, act and control resources in an autonomous way. On an average a woman works 15 to 16 hours a day unpaid at home and underpaid outside. Among strategies for women empowerment,

Government policies such as 73 and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution, Reservation policies, concessions, social legislation and enactment of certain acts were found be very important. However, the effect of such strategies failed to reach the target due to various bureaucratic and systemic failures.