

Women's Empowerment a Rhetoric or Reality

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Abstract: The author tries to look at the present scenario of women's empowerment and tries to analyze whether the women's empowerment has been achieved to the desired level or it is still in pen and policy and not in practice. She has shared her views generated from her experience and observations, in this domain of women's empowerment. It has been left to the reader's choices, whether women empowerment is a rhetoric or reality.

Introduction

The marginal role of women and cultural practices that uphold this status are plenty in history. Women were seen as lesser than men and seen as a property. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally under privileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but in India it is the disproportionate sex ratio, whereby women's population is comparatively lower than the men. Women's empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, economical strengths of women. It is the process of guarding them. It involves the building up of a society, a political environment, where women can be without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discriminations, torture and persecution. Policies on women's empowerment exist as a rhetoric, but in practice there is a significant gap in many sectors such as health, education, economic opportunities, gender violence, political role between the policy level and practical level.

The Status of Women in India

The status and role of women in India, have been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. Women during the early Vedic period enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. Women were allowed to study the Vedas. In medieval times this was dismissed on the ground that, "this was the case in previous age" (Yuga). In approximately 500 BC the status of women began to decline. Women in India faced restrictions and confinements. Indian women's position in society further deteriorated during this medieval period. Child marriage and ban on widow remarriage became part of social life. Polygamy was practised among the Hindu Kshatriya rulers. Women enjoined to be being service to their husbands. Many socialreformers fought for women's rights and betterment.

According to a report, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women, and India was the noted as the worst country for women among G20 countries. Police records in India show a high incidence of crime against women. Earlier, many crimes against women were not reported to police due to the social stigma. Women are subjected to the violence like acid throwing, domestic violence and the social earls like child marriage, dowry, female foeticide and infoeticide. The latest violence which women are victimized is honor killing. When a girl is involved in inter caste or inter religion marriage against her parent wishes, she is killed, in order to protect the family honour, dignity and prestige.

Of late it is being hyped that women have broken all the barriers and invaded into the frontiers of men, like Defence services, Fire services, Air Pilot, etc.. Women have held high esteemed positions like Prime Minister, President, Lok Sabha speaker, Chief Minister, Supreme Court Judge, but these are all may be one in a million, what about the rest of the women population. India is a country of mostly rural population and if we look at the women of those interior rural and tribal areas, they still go through all sorts of violence, social practices which lower their self respect and esteem. Rural life is a particularly ordered environment a way of life that many rural people experience collectively as well as individually. There can be a sense of belonging, safety and support but that the choices of rural life can create a sense of rigid traditional value system, control and even intimidation. Familial relation are structured on hierarchical relationships which are based on traditional inequalities between men and women. If we view the status of dalit women, they are all still marginalized, not at all in the main stream of society, they go through all sorts of caste discrimination which they accept and suffer in silence. When are they going to come to the forefront and voice out. Leave the urban women, they are somewhat educated and empowered and know how to take care of themselves against their social evils and practices. But these evils of dowry deaths and honour killing still do take place in the middle and upper middle caste conscious population. How are we going to correct them. Despite the various women empowerment programmes by the Government, NGO's Voluntary organizations, women activists feminist groups, we are not able to achieve the desired result of women's betterment through empowerment. Women

are still at the disadvantageous position. The 33% reservation for women's bill in the Parliament is yet to take a final shape and be passed, despite many political parties', election manifesto and assurances.

Against all these odds and impediments, women have to really swim against the current of social and political barriers and get them empowered. This term women's empowerment seems to be a paradox.

Status of Women in the Global Level

From the local to the global level, women's leadership and political participation are restricted. Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, civil services, the private sectors or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.

As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation note, "women in every part of the world continue to be largely, marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminating laws, practice, attitudes and gender stereo types, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women".

Individual women have overcome these obstacles, with great acceleration and often to the benefit of society at large. But for women as a whole, the playing field needs to level opening opportunities for all.

A research study done in 2012, on "Norms and Agency – gender equality with men and women in 20 countries" by World Bank, across 20 countries, with 4000 women and men in 93 communities, examined the patterns across communication on social norms and gender roles, path ways of empowerment and factors that drive acute inequalities had the following findings,

"women are gaining increased control over economic and economic decisions, while men's perception are that their control and well being are more stagnant".

"Girls desire for education exceeded that of boys in rural and urban communities".

"women's ability to contribute family and control (even partially) major or minor assets help them gain more voice at home and public spheres".

"when only a few women manage to break with established norm's

– without a critical mass – traditional norms are not contested and may be reinforced.

In the year 1995, there was a declaration in the convention of United nation's Economic and social council's Commission on Status of Women (CSW) at Beijing on women's gender equality. This CSW reviews women's status every year at New York, globally. The UN women is the organisation dedicated to gender equality and empowerment of women globally. Even 12 years after the Beijing declaration for women, the system of women has not attained the desirable level, globally.

Conclusion

Why the cherished dream of becoming "an autonomous and self determining women seems remote and inaccessible to the average Indian Women. The conflict for autonomy and separate identify remain an unfinished combat. If there is to be true female independence, much needs to be done. Debates and conferences on this issue locally, statewide, nationwide need to take place by involving the grass root level women also. These debates and conferences should be the concerted efforts towards ensuring an effective platform for of presentations and discussions of the academicians, research scholars, women activists, NGO's and women development professionals, to explore the emerging issues and current challenges in the sphere of the so called women's empowerment and the possible solutions. The UN, women commission on 'Status of Women' has chosen the priority theme, as "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls". The review theme for this is, "Participation in and access of women to the media and information and communication technologies and their impact and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women" Let us wait and watch, whether the above set in goals are going to be achieved. Keep our fingers crossed.

References

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