

GENDER BIAS Vs WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Dr Savita Poonia, Associate Professor of English, Govt. College Jind, Haryana (India), Email: savita120179@gmail.com

***Woman is the builder and moulder of a Nation's destiny
Though delicate and soft as a lily,
She has a heart. stronger and holder than that of a man,
She is the Supreme inspiration for man's onward march"***

R.N. Tagore

INTRODUCTION

Women have been adored since time immemorial as Virtues Incarnates. Our scriptures address 'Saraswati' as 'The Goddess of Learning'; Parvati, 'the Goddess of chastity'; Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth'; Durga & Kali, 'the Goddess of Power and Energy'. Even Manu, the great scholar said, 'where women are worshipped, there the deities are pleased' (Maitryi, Lilawati, Gargi, Katyayani are some of the unforgettable names which can neither wither nor become absolute. In ancient India, women were the centre and foundation of the social and cultural life of the family. The duties of women were just confined to bring up the children and caring every family member with her loving and amiable characteristics, which she naturally owes, Home was the, woman's sphere of activity. 'Men make houses and women make homes' was the traditional belief

With the political emancipation of India, the women of free India ushered into a new role. Today there is no field where women have not shown their worth. From holding highest Public Office in bureaucracy to holding highest Political position, women of 21 century have shouldered all kinds of responsibilities with grand success. A lot of change has taken place in their position in this man dominated society. Today she enjoys equality of status, equality of opportunities with men. She has become financially independent and economically sound; she has become the major decision maker, the policy maker in various new fields of activity. Though she has ventured into outer fields but the traditional view about her role as Home Maker about her so-called sacred duties of Mother, Sister, Wife still kept on demanding on her. With this gradual transition from household life to working women the differing of women have increased manifold.

Women comprise nearly 50 percent of the world's population. As such women should have an equal say in all occupations. That is why empowerment of women has been recognized globally as a key element to achieve progress in all areas. The 'Charter of United Nations' signed in 1945 is the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality as a fundamental right. A number of conventions, goals and Programmes are being organized since 1945 to empower women. Moreover, UN General Assembly also adopted "Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women". This Convention also took efforts to empower rural women, so that they can get benefit from rural development. Now the question arises, 'what does empowerment of Women imply'? Women empowerment implies process; by which, women's power of self employment is reinforced; they develop the capacity of self-reliance to get out of their traditional role of subordination, It encompasses their ability to make choices, control resources and enjoy participatory relationship within Family and community. The most vital question is their ability to take independent decisions; at the same time, they must have access to the resources to sustain these decisions. It can only happen if they could increase their level of self-consciousness regarding their discrimination in social life and are ready to transcend the Sociological and Psychological barriers confronted by them. The establishment of National Commission in January 1992 to monitor the women reservation of seats to the elections of Village Panchayat and the proposed 1/3 seats for the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies testifies to the increasing recognition of the role of women in the power structure of our society. Today, with the growing awareness, she is learning to claim the status given to her in mythology.

Now she wants to find her identity rediscover her strength Indira Gandhi (First woman Prime Minister of India) Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit (the first woman President of the UN General Assembly). Mother Teresa Amrita Pritam Kiran Bedi and Kalpana Chawla are the names of a few luminaries whose identities will never sink into the sands of oblivion. Kiran Bedi has even excelled her male counterparts in Jail reforms as a Supercop for which she was awarded Masaysay Award. Nisha Sharma a girl from UP. was in the news for sometime, who boldly sent her prospective groom and in-laws to jail for making unreasonable dowry demands. On the world scenario, in the sphere of Science and Technology, everyone remembers Kalpana Chawla's daring personality. Women today are taking up new challenging careers in administration, law, business, politics, social work, literature, airlines etc. They are no longer confined to homes and only household duties. They are now equal to men and contribute equally in matters of finance.

Nowadays Indian women can aspire for any status in the society. State has also recognized the growing need for women's contribution in the society, in the market, in the industry and has attempted to give them what was theirs, i.e. some breathing space and freedom. The Constitution of India guarantees them all those rights, freedoms and privileges enjoyed by the male. In the Preamble of our Constitution itself, one of the objective set is equality to all its citizens in every respect. According to Article 14, every citizen is equal before law whether he is a male or a female. Article 15 prohibits discrimination by the state on grounds of religion, caste, race, sex or place of birth. Article 16 provides equal opportunity in matters of employment under state except a few. Article 39(D) requires the state to direct its policy towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Along with these Articles, Government of India has enunciated a No. of women specific and women-related policies in all plan documents. The National Plan of Action for woman adopted in 1976 becomes a guiding document for the development of women. A National Perspective Plan for women (1988-2000) was also drafted advocating a holistic approach for the development of women. The National Nutritional Policy, the National Policy on Education the National Population Policy has significant components for women aiming at their empowerment.

The discussion of women empowerment cannot be completed without discussing the issue of sharing power and property in the 74th constitutional amendment (a new methodology of Gram Panchayat was envisaged, in reservation for women to be elected). This resulted in a new way of sharing of administrative power with women. Now there is reservation for women in Municipalities and Panchayats, which is at least 33% of total seats. Women are also equal in inheritance of the property of father or mother. This sharing of administration and property has done a lot in making women's status more powerful. Various other Legislations have also been passed by the Government of India to safeguard Constitutional rights of women for example, the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1956), Child Marriage Restraint Act (1978) etc. Moreover, various welfare measures have also been taken up by the Government of India for the emancipation of women like Indira Mahila Yojna, Balika Samridhi Yojna, Mahila Samridhi Yojna etc. These Programmes aim at the holistic empowerment of women through awareness, generation of resources, economic empowerment and convergence of various schemes. Due to these efforts taken by the Government of our country the status of our women is now much developed as compared to their status 50 years back.

In the present environment of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization, the walls of gender discrimination are breaking rapidly. However, if we analyze the achievements of the above mentioned plans, programs, policies etc.

which are meant for empowering our women, we will find that even after 60 years of Planning, Women in our country are still suppressed and oppressed and do not enjoy much liberty in any of the fields. The Human Development Report also shows an increase in maternal mortality rate, girl infant mortality rate, cases of rape, female foeticide, dowry deaths, discrimination, harassment and a high gender gap at all levels

In India, mythological women are Shakti; but sociologically, they are not as crime against women is on increase. At each level in our society, for example family, household, kin group, community and nation women is discriminated. Not only discrimination women also face harassment at each step in all walks of life. These harassments consist of evils like selling of women in the brothels, gang rape, incest and burning of brides for not bringing sufficient dowry and callous behaviour, honour killings etc. Day by day, the situation of women is deteriorating further and further. In India, in the capital itself, there is news of rape almost every alternate day due to which the city has been declared unsafe for women.

Although our graph of literacy is on the rise after independence and India has been developing in all spheres but it sad to see that attitude towards women have indeed gone from bad to worse. Female foeticide, female infanticide and child marriage are still prevalent in many parts of the country despite protection from law. The practice of dowry is still plaguing every family having marriageable daughters. Statistics reveal 900 Dowry deaths every year. The birth of a girl is still not welcomed in the Indian society due to which there has been a fall in the rate of female birth. Widow marriage has still to gather momentum. Widows who are not welcomed in their homes are forced to live in abject penury in the pilgrim centers of Mathura, Vrindavan and Varanasi. Women are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. More often, we hear about incidents of sexual harassment at work places, sexual abuse of female children, eve teasing and frequent cases of rape. Thus in the true sense of the term. Indian women still lag behind in all spheres. The so-called empowered woman comprise only 5% to 10% of the total women population, Women do far better than men in the academic earner but when it comes to engineering, technical services and top most positions, society does not seem to favour them. Even in the Civil Services, some specific jobs are denied to women. In states like Punjab and Haryana, women IAS officers, generally are denied post of District Collectors. In the Political Sphere, the representation of women in the Parliament is only 8 to 10% of the total seats though she forms almost half of the population of the country. In the 14th Lok Sabha elections, women candidates bagged only 44 seats. We are still not able to achieve even 10% of our target. In uplifting women even after so many years of independence. It seems that Gender equality is a thing of books and not of reality. Another ingredient of women's empowerment is economic earning and productivity. In subsistence economic like India, women perform the lion's share of work in and around the home and in the fields. But they are viewed unproductive by their family, Government and economist, because their work is unpaid in nature. They continuously perform jobs for which they do not get any payment, e.g. Cooking of food, collection of firewood for the house, carrying pails of water from a long distance, looking after children etc. Women have to work doubly as employed individuals and homemakers. A working woman has to balance her home life and career to join the mainstream of humanity. She wakes up early to do the daily household chores and then gets ready for office. Coming back home, she again remains busy in the kitchen. Rest seems to mock at her. In our society, a man is generally not required to participate in these domestic jobs. If seen sharing them, he is ridiculed for his "woman like behavior". Thus, it is extremely necessary that women get respect for these domestic works.

women in our Society generally remain confined within the four walls of their house. They are not allowed to participate in the decision-making in the family. In this Patriarchal society, she still needs protection from her father as a daughter, depend on her husband as a married woman and seeks support from her Son or husband as an old woman as if God has made her to live under dominance of men and work for them. Sometimes it seems that in the present male dominated, patriarchal society, people find it difficult to accept woman as an independent personality. Thus, there is still a long way for the Indian women to bear the stamp of advancement.

Fearlessness, which is the prime ingredient of women's empowerment, implies absence of crime against women. Thus, just empowering women through different policies and Programmes alone cannot help our women in removing their fear or being harassed by the culprits. For removing

this fear, speedy justice delivery system is needed. Investigating machinery has to be made more efficient, the process of justice has to be made more sensitive towards women and punishment for sexual atrocities should be made more stringent. Then only crime against women will decrease and the fear in the mind of women will be reduced.

But these things cannot come through empowerment only. This requires changing the mentality of our society as a whole because not only men, women themselves sometimes become the enemy of women. That is why there is something more required than empowerment to uplift the status of women.

Mere inclusion of Political reforms, Social reforms, Constitutional Provisions, Rights are not enough. The issue is very critical; and it requires introspection by women at first hand and of course by men. It is only through a new way of thinking, a broad perspective of analysis, an objective approach, and a rational stream of thoughts irrespective of gender we can think of some degrees of change. Empowerment could only be achieved by first creating a positive environment for the perception of the role of women. Two- third of world's adult illiterates are women and 70% of the world's poor population is women. These Problems are of much concern in case of India and world as well. There is a dire need to formulate a 'Comprehensive Global Action Plan to improve the living Conditions of the 'deprived and backward' girls and adolescent females

This could be done by generating awareness on key issues like Sex Ratio and making people realize that woman laid and all values. They are the Flag Holders and the Mothers of Civilization representing the overall picture of their families with regard to Social, Political, Economic and Educational aspects.

in my opinion along with other provisions and policies there must be the provision of vocational training along with education for women so that they can earn profitably. Our present system does not adequately provide for imparting vocational skills which alone can ensure a quick beginning of their earning. Women acquiring skills in traditional ways find no institutional arrangements for expanding or updating their skills. There are no training institutions where such training courses are available at lower cost as per the training needs of the traditionally skilled women. However, we can use the powerful medium of TV network to widespread vocational training facilities at cheaper rate.

Besides this, empowerment of women demands a more focused and strong involvement of their creativity, their initiative, and their potential in all fields of activity. They must not be deprived of the 'privileges of participation' into any area, which is open to men. They must be definitely equally compensated and made aware of macro economic policies, which provide opportunity of self-employment and other incentives. There is an imperative need to adopt an integrated approach towards empowering women through effective convergence of

Existing services resources infrastructure and manpower in both women-specific and women-related sectors and further to adopt a special strategy of Women's Component Plan to ensure that not less than 30 Percent of funds/benefits flow to women from all the development sectors. Moreover, if we want to empower women in the real sense then all forms of violence against women physical and mental whether at domestic or societal level should be dealt effectively. All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. It was aptly said by Swami Vivekanand, "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves then they will tell you what reforms are needed.

Above all the need of the hour is to change the social attitude towards her. The emancipation of women should not be the concern of only lawmakers and social workers; it should be a common goal for everyone. Once we change our mindset, we can easily attain gender equality. Women's empowerment means a lot but the ultimate goal of gender equality would materialize only when her complementary role will be recognized by the society.

Nothing more can be said then the following lines which sum up the whole argument:

अब तो मजहब कोई ऐसा भी चलाया जाये
जिससे औरत को भी इन्सान बताया जाये
जिस्म ही सिर्फ नहीं दिल भी एक हों अपने
मेरा आसू तेरी आँखों में भी पाया जाये।
इस नये दौर का हो करवाचौथ कुछ ऐसा
मैं रहूँ भूखी तो तुझ से भी ना खाया जाये ।
ये ख्वाब है मेरा भी कि अब रोशनी हो तो कुछ ऐसी
जिसमें खून किसी का भी न चिरागों में जलाया जाये ।

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