

EXPLOITATION A CRITICAL ASPECT TO OVERCOME DEGRADATION AND DETERIORATION OF WOMEN

SUMATI D. SURWASE

Abstract: The term Empowerment can be viewed as a medium of creating a social environment in which one can find space for self-development that is a beginning of social transformation. At present, the subject of women empowerment has become a burning issue in India. At present women in India are participating in various sectors such as education, art, sports, science and technology but they are still subjected to discrimination. A critical aspect of empowerment of women in India is the promotion of gender equality but if we observe the current status of women in India, they are encouraged for educational and economical adventures but are still neglected as the individual beings. At present the emotional torture has become another way of women exploitation that causes the mental degradation and deterioration of women. Therefore, at initial level there is a need to change the basic human tendency to look at woman not as an object or a machine but a human, with senses feelings and thoughts because empowerment is not just to strengthen the social or economic status of women but to have respect, self-confidence and freedom to articulate their self-values

Key terms: Empowerment, gender equality, self-development, self-values, crisis.

Introduction: Hillary Clinton once said 'I believe that the rights of women and girls is the unfinished business of the 21st century'. This statement by her is absolutely precise in Indian context because in Indian society women still have to struggle for their basic rights. History reveals that women were (are) deprived and made to suffer on the basis of gender, culture, race and region. They were tortured physically and emotionally through practices such as Sati, Jauhar, Purdah, and Devdasi. The reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotirao Phule fought for the advancement of women. In the 1950s the Constitution of India, in articles 14, 15, 16, assured equality and liberty to all women. But it is a tragedy of the Indian society that at present the practice of discrimination and domination is continued, women are still oppressed. The olden scene of the sufferings of women is the same; the only thing that has been changed is the reasons and the ways of oppression. Everyday there are the news of rapes, domestic violence, sexual harassments and killings of women. Hence, the present paper emphasises on the concept of women empowerment in India.

Verbally, empowerment is related to the word power. In English it means 'the granting of political, social or economic power to an individual or group' (online English Dictionary). The word empowerment refers to increasing self-determination and professional support to people from people. It is originated from the American psychology that studies the individual's context within the communities and societies. It is associated with the social scientist Julian Rappaport who defined "empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by people, organization and communities gain mastery over their lives". Rowlands Jo in her book *Questioning Empowerment: working*

with women in Honduras defined empowerment as "it is bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it." According to Rowland empowerment to be operated within three dimensions:

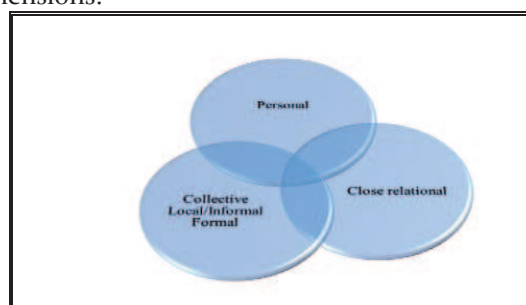


Figure 1

- A. Personal- develops the sense of self and individual confidence and capacity and undoing the effects of internalized oppressions
- B. Relational- developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.
- C. Collective: it comprises of involvement of political structures but might also cover action based co-operative rather than competition.

This three dimensions discussed above help to understand the concept of empowerment with the social and individual perspectives.

In 1986 the word empowerment was used in India in the context of social, political, educational and economic growth of women in India. Hence, the term women empowerment refers to social, political, legal and economic strengthening of women. Therefore, women's empowerment is an important factor for the development of the society because-

- It enables them to live their life with self-respect and dignity

- It gives equal social status
- It gives equal opportunity for education and career
- It gives space for the self-development
- It creates the sense of individualism
- It gives rights to make own decisions and choices for their lives
- It facilitates to determine the economic and financial choices
- It gives equal employment chance without any gender bias

Over all, the women empowerment initiates the sense of equality, liberty and self-esteem among women and society, but it is quite ironical that in 21st century women are still confined, directly or indirectly, to the traditional gender roles of society because all the policies made by the government have become mere a paperwork.

At present, if the social situation of women in India is observed, they are free for education and possible career opportunities but in this process of getting educated and placement they undergo various circumstances such as gender discrimination, sexual harassments, honour killing etc. But this is not the only phase where they are oppressed. The journey of social oppressions begins with their birth itself, as in Indian culture, the birth of a female child is considered as a curse because she is considered inferior compared to male; since a man is someone who continues the clan. On the other hand, a woman is a social and financial burden for the family and further this ideology results in the female infanticide which is the burning issue in India. The next phase of discrimination begins with the kind of treatment that to be given in the family. The sense of being a girl(female) is inculcated since childhood. Hence, this is the phase that enables them to adopt and accept the patriarchy and traditional gender roles of being a woman. Some families still do not allow girls to study practical sciences, perhaps they are supposed to study humanities or home sciences. The major phase is of marriage. In India *Kanyadan* (to give the bride away) is considered as the greatest duties to be performed by a father because a woman is associated with the dignity and honour of the family. Therefore, the family expects the girl to marry within the norms of society. This pander communalism and casteism in the society. At the rural areas many women have been forced for dowry. The cases of domestic strife have been also recorded every here and now. But in all these, rape is the most common crime against women in India. According to the National Crime Record Bureau 2013 annual report, 24923 cases were reported across the nation in 2012. The recent Kopardi rape incident was a disgrace to humanity. These rape incidents underline the social subordination and subjugation of women. Thus, India being the land of

cultures and ethics, day by day the crimes against women have been increasing constantly in the country. The National Crime Report Bureau presented the year wise record of the most contaminated crimes up to December 2015 which is displayed as follows:

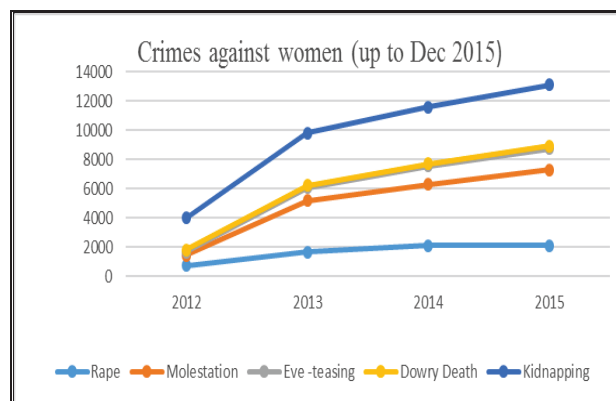


Figure 2

Here, an attempt is made to study the ratio and nature of crime that was reported against women according to the latest data released The National Crime Record Bureau.

But it has been observed that in rural areas, girls are still deprived of basic education rights. When it comes to educational empowerment, both the sections of nation; rural and urban are equally important because education is the only medium for self-development and social reformation.

Economic Empowerment: If women are economically empowered, they can build healthy and educated family. It will also help to reduce the poverty in society but economic empowerment is not just enough in Indian context. In order to gain economic empowerment, first of all the economic literacy among women should be developed. For example, many women work on higher positions but when it comes to the use and investment of money; they are dependent on the heads of family. Therefore, they should be allowed to make decisions about their own economy. Hence, they should be made aware of the economic policies and its use in banks, insurance and in other basic investments.

Political Empowerment: Promoting the participation of women in political field is really crucial aspect. It will get them directly in the process of decision making, active involvement in communal affairs in addition to it, they can be a hand and motivation for the underprivileged group of women.

Cultural and Religious Empowerment: It has been proved that women are the most important unit of cultural development. Therefore, they should not be restricted due to any traditions. It may hinder their personal development. A religion is made for the entire humanity. So, woman, being a human, should give equal right to perform all religious rites.

Personal and Individual Empowerment: This is the most important aspect of women empowerment because since childhood women are told that they are women and therefore cannot do this and that. Hence, they are not socially marginalized but are psychologically oppressed. This oppression both social and psychological may create mental anxiety and cause minor or major health issues. Therefore, at the initial level this sense to be imbedded in their mind that they are not just women but human beings too. They should be given chance to articulate their feelings and thoughts over things. This will instil the confidence and self-respect among them. It will motivate them to come out of the rooster coop and live as equally as men.

Conclusion: Empowering women is not an easy task, because India has a background of patriarchal

culture. It is very difficult to change the culture of disregard for women as it is deeply rooted in the society. Empowerment is not just to strengthen the social or economic status of women but it is all about instilling self-respect, self-confidence and self-values. Therefore, it is very important for women to change their own mentality to look at themselves, because empowerment cannot be achieved by competing with men and established themselves as superior or strong. It could be simply achieved through cooperation and negotiation with each other. When this thought of 'being woman is great' is developed and accepted among women, that time women are really empowered.

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Sumati D. Surwase
Savitribai Phule pune University, Pune