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## UNDERSTANDING MORAL STATUS OF GENDER AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY OF LIVELIHOOD

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*Abstract*

*Women empowerment needs to be both realized as well as assessed are social, political and economic. Women education faces a number of social, cultural, economic and psychological barriers. Societal expectations reflect a traditional bias, where the ideal women being one who is loyal, faithful, passive, submissive, self-effacing and self-sacrificing. Increasing malnutrition and repeated pregnancies may make her life expendable; nevertheless she would have fulfilled her main role of bearing children, preferably sons. This social argument is reinforced by the general lack of employable skills in women, on account of their low literacy and lack of training. Further, misinterpretation of religion and cultural often tend to depress women's status and role. The resultant low self- image is so internalized as to inhibit any self-motivation for learning on the part of most women. However, the process of women's empowerment should be critically linked to the issue of sustainability of their own livelihoods. If and only if a woman's livelihood is ensured in a sustainable manner, would she be a willing stakeholder towards her empowerment. So policy and grassroots action should take into cognizance the value of developing and promoting self-help groups for women's empowerment and her development, which has been highlighted in this paper.*

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Women education, Sustainability, Education.

### Introduction

Traditionally in many societies, being male or female meant that one had different moral obligations and a different moral status. In the West, women were thought to be more emotional and less rational than men, and so women were assigned the task of primary child-raisers and not given much of a voice in the political affairs of their societies. In most societies, women are considered weak and in need of protection by a man. As women have become increasingly involved in public affairs, they have been subjected to discriminatory treatment of various forms, often explicitly rationalized by reference to the fact that they have different natures from men. There are indeed biological differences between men and women. Women menstruate, gestate, and lactate, whereas men do not. Men ejaculate, whereas women do not. Beyond these differences,

it is true that in general women as a group differ from men as a group. Men have greater upper body strength than women. Women in the West score more highly on verbal tests than men, and men score more highly on mathematical tests than women. Here, though, the differences are statistical, not natural, for there are some women who have greater upper body strength than most men. The question to be raised is this: Do these natural and statistical differences between males and females call for differences in moral obligation or moral status?

In many societies, natural and statistical differences between men and women are indeed thought to justify differential treatment of the sexes. In some Islamic societies, it is considered immoral for women to appear in public without being veiled, whereas this is not true for men. In many societies, especially in Asia, there is a strong preference for male children over female children, which has resulted in the commonly accepted practice of neglected of female newborns. Such practices have led to a disproportionate female mortality rate. In the United States, parents continue to voice a similarity strong preference for male over female children, and they spend a disproportionate amount of money educating their sons. Until quite recently the term “lady lawyer” was a commonly accepted term of derision.

Crimes that are gender linked have also not been given the same status in many societies. Rape and sexual harassment in the United States are often not taken as seriously as are similar assault crimes that are not predominantly directed against women. The public humiliation of Anita Hill who accused Clarence Thomas of sexually harassing her when he was her supervisor at the equal Employment Opportunity Commission is only the most recent example. Sexual harassment and even sexual slavery are severe problems in many parts of the world and are generally not considered as important as other crimes. In what follows we will survey some of the main viewpoints on the moral justifiability of differential treatment based on gender.

A selection from Sally Haslanger, she discusses how best to characterize “women” and “men” gives that these are not natural, but rather social, categories. Haslanger first explains what it means for categories to be socially constructed. Despite appearances, who are called “women” and “men” are not so called primarily because of immutable natural characteristics. Physical or anatomical features do not determine membership in these groups or categories. Instead, she argues, these gender categories are socially constructed; they are caused by social forces in given societies. He also said that “women” refers to those who are systematically subordinated and that “men” refers to those who have a systematic privilege in their society.

### **Understanding Women Empowerment as a dynamic process**

The term empowerment has the most conspicuous feature containing the word ‘power’ which means control over material assets and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a very positive concept with the capacity for self-action and the subsequent transformation of the self, the environment or of society at large. It is inextricably linked to both the ability and opportunity to make decisions and to act for one’s own self. Thus empowerment of the weak and the backward is egalitarian in nature, stressing the competence and right of people to take charge of their own destinies. For the powerless, this entails a bottom up process whereby they transform from passive or reactive subjects to positive actors in the drama of their individual lives. The concept too is dynamic, since change is a constant phenomenon in life.

Empowerment is a process that is both individual as well as group oriented, since it is through involvement in groups that people most often believe to develop their awareness and the ability to organize and take action to bring about change, often leading to improved decision making capacity at home and at the community level, and greater participation in politics. In the process, empowerment will help women make better use of their talents to lead better lives. They do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equal and cooperate in order to work towards the common goal. It is therefore a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context.

The process of women's empowerment should be critically linked to the issue of sustainability of their own livelihoods. If and only if a woman's livelihood is ensured in a sustainable manner, would she be a willing stakeholder towards her empowerment. So policy and grassroots action should take into cognizance the value of developing and promoting self-help groups for women's empowerment and her development. It is with economic independence that the Indian women can be on the road to social change. The need of the hour is to empower women as India's development is intrinsically linked to the social, economic and political empowerment of every discrimination is the key to real empowerment and this empowerment has to be brought about through a bottom up approach led by the community's proactive participation.

Women's empowerment needs to be both realized as well as assessed are social, political and economic. Women's education faces a number of social, cultural, economic and psychological barriers. Societal expectations reflect a traditional bias, where the ideal women being one who is loyal, faithful, passive, submissive, self-effacing and self-sacrificing. Increasing malnutrition and repeated pregnancies may make her life expendable; nevertheless she would have fulfilled her main role of bearing children, preferably sons. This social argument is reinforced by the general lack of employable skills in women, on account of their low literacy and lack of training. Further, misinterpretation of religion and cultural often tend to depress women's status and role. The resultant low self- image is so internalized as to inhibit any self-motivation for learning on the part of most women. Also, in conditions of poverty, the poor cannot see how sending their daughters to school can change their existential reality. Even when girls enroll in school, the scheme of education seems to reinforce their subordination. The existing system of education thus reproduces not only the social class power structure but also the prevailing gender disparities.

To sum up the problem, most of the educated women lack entrepreneurial qualities to a greater extent whether employed or unemployed. The educated unemployed women seem to be the victims of the requirements of entrepreneurial qualities to a greater extent. Comparatively they have lower level of achievement motivation, they decline to take risk and are generally less mobile and present a picture of helplessness, which characterize the unemployed youth in general.

### **Education and Women Empowerment: Several Initiatives**

Women education should aim at economic independence and self-reliance. Their education should be in a positive direction through which women achieve self- respect and self-confidence. Though protective legislation is in place to protect women from being brutalized or sexually exploited at work places, the danger also prevails on their way to work places or from field inspections, etc. Relatively on the women are more superstitious and prejudiced. So the courses should be designed in such a way that they develop individual reasoning and logic to overcome their ignorance, which is an obstacle in the way of progress and advancement of an individual. Women's institutions should provide special opportunities for those women who for some reason or the other could not pursue their education and had to drop out, but are willing to continue their course of study after a break. On the whole women's education should be directed at the development of personality, economic independence and self-occupations, and in greater spheres of influences.

A variety of socioeconomic factors are responsible for women's lower educational attainment, including direct costs, the need for female labor, the low expected returns, and social restrictions. Education helps reducing child marriage, infant mortality rate and also minimizing the risk of female mortality during childbirth. In recently, *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is an initiative taken by the Govt. of West Bengal to improve the life and the status of the girls helping economically backward families with cash so that families do not arrange the marriage of their girl child before eighteen years because of economic problem. The purpose of this initiative is to uplift those girls who are from poor families and thus can't pursue higher studies due to tough economic conditions. It has been given international recognition by United Kingdoms Department of International Development and the UNICEF. Education is also inversely proportional to the chances of falling prey to the exploitative forces. Finally education will lead to greater participation of women in various community led activities and better entrepreneurial opportunities, and realize the goal of achieving economic independence, a vital cog in the wheel of women's empowerment, and thereby to social change.

In this regard it is worth mentioning the new role of UGC in introducing the Extension Approach in the university system, which is to extend educational opportunities to those who have not been able to attend institutes of higher learning, to render services to different sections of society. Again illiteracy and are closely linked. Illiteracy among women belonging to the lower socio-economic group is higher, which is mainly due to induction into labor force at school going ages to supplement family income. Literacy opens the possibility of unlimited exposure to new information and more importantly, to new ways of thinking and new perspectives of existing information. It helps women to be constructively able to express their talents and give direction to constructively able to express their talents and give direction to their aptitudes. It leads to better hygiene, improved nutritional practices, better mother and child health, etc. caring for family health with timely medical intervention. Also helps establishing a linkage by making an informed choice in birth control. It can be mentioned that the key to economy squarely rests, at least in the Indian context, on achieving some control over population growth. Education to the women and merely female literacy is a crucial step towards realization of this goal. Women are frequently prevented from working outside home and often travelling without a chaperon. Improving women's health requires a strong and sustained government commitment, a favorable policy environment, and well-targeted resources.

### **Conclusion**

Women take care of the basic needs of society like food, fuel, fodder and shelter and nurturing, and as such they are more in tune with nature. History has shown repeatedly that women have led peace and ecology movements in the world as well as in India. So sustainable development has to include women, if not be women centric altogether. To effectively implement the agenda for women's equality and empowerment it is imperative to create a strong and result oriented institutional structure at the national and international level, provide the needed financial support system. It is also believed that empowerment will lead us our search for a world free of violence and war. The Government and women both have to interests about the changes. Women's groups have missionary zeal and commitment, but they do not have resources, reach or authority to bring about concrete changes.

Empowerment entails struggle; learning to deal with the forces of oppression; entails having a vision of new society, with a conscious and deliberate intervention and effort to enhance the quality of life. Economic empowerment focuses on improving women's control over material resources thereby strengthening their economic security. It also requires transfer of skills of management and control of the economic activities to the women's groups so as to enable them to feel confident and empowered. From the women's empowerment perspective; it's imperative that women's economic activities are viable. This can be successfully done by providing training and capacity building assistance to the women's self-help groups, developing them into operational units producing goods and services that can cater to the local market in an economically meaningful manner, thereby the capacities and competencies of the poor and underprivileged women can be enhanced to cope with the existing market system, and ultimately fulfill the attainment of the social change. With women slowly gaining control and being involved in the decision making process, and as members of the society, real empowerment will emerge and a change in women's status will certainly take place.

Once economic empowerment is achieved, it will have major implications on the overall empowerment of women. Intra-family relationships and domestic work culture may change dramatically, resulting in social empowerment. A more equitable participation of women in decisions concerning the family leadership and active participation at the community level will improve political acumen and eventually help in successful political empowerment. Political empowerment will, in turn, result in more representative planning for women and a strengthening and sustaining of the process of overall empowerment of women.



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