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A Study On Women Empowerment In India With Special Reference To Assam

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyze the status of Women Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely from secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment. Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. In this regard, we may mention the name of the British people. After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social position of women with men. Today we have seen the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely freed some discrimination and harassment of the society. A few numbers of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, each and every should be careful to promote the women statuses.

Keywords: Women Education, Women Empowerment, Women Rights, NGOs, Violence against Women

INTRODUCTION

Women constituted the key role in the arch of Indian society. No doubt the Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good. Even the women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities (Saravanakumar, 2016). Indian society doubts that we are in the midst of a great revolution in the history of women. The voice of women is increasingly heard in Parliament, courts and in the streets. While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, (Altekar, 1983) like the right to vote, the Constitution of India has given women equal rights with men from the beginning. The Ancient and medieval status of women in modern Indian society regarding Equality, Education, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender, Religion and Culture is maintained or deteriorated. During the Vedic Age wife was put in an esteemed position. She was considered as half of the man, his trust friend, companion in solitude, father in advice and the rest in passing the wilderness of Life. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning or sati, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position. The Indian cultural tradition begins with the Vedas. It is generally believed that the Vedic period is spread over from 2000 BC to 500 B.C. Vedic women had economic freedom. Some women were engaged in teaching work. Home was the place of production. Spinning and weaving of clothes were done at home. Women also helped their husbands in agricultural pursuits. The Medieval period (Period between 500 A.D to 1500 A.D) proved to be highly disappointing for the Indian women, for their status further deteriorated during this period. Medieval India was not women's age it is supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. The Ancient and medieval status of women in modern Indian society regarding Equality, Education, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender, Religion and Culture is maintained or deteriorated. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. In Vedic India, women did not enjoy an inferior status rather they occupied an honorable place. They had ample rights in the social and the religious fields and limited rights in the economic and the political fields. They were not treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men. We have honored our country as our Motherland "Bharat Mata" and our nationalism has grown up from the seed Mantra "Vande Mataram".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the historical profile of Indian Women.
2. To know the need of Women Empowerment
3. To offer useful suggestions in the light of Findings.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is about change, choice and power. It is a process of change by which the individuals and groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives. Women empowerment is a stage of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way. According to K. Sayulu, G. Sardar & B. Sridevi, (2005) "Women empowerment is any process that provides greater autonomy to women through the sharing of relevant information and provision of control over factors affecting their performance".

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment possesses certain characteristics. They are the following:

- Women empowerment enables a greater degree of self-confidence and a sense of independence among women.
- Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.
- Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves to increase their self-reliance.
- Women empowerment provides greater autonomy to women.
- Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
- Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structures of society.
- Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.
- Empowerment of women enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
- Empowerment also means equal status to women.
- Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community.
- Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is a continuous and dynamic procedure which allows women to take an interest in the choice – making in all financial, political and social procedures in the general public and improves their capacities to change the structure and condition that keep them hindered. Empowerment of women is essential for maintaining economic development of the nation when 50 percent of the populace comprises of ladies. As Ex-President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam stated that empowering women is an essential for making a decent country, when women are empowered, society with stability is guaranteed. Women's empowerment is crucial as their considerations and their value system lead to the improvement of a decent family, great society and eventually a decent country. It has been acknowledged worldwide that country's advancement is not thinkable without women's empowerment. The worldwide efforts towards women's empowerment have made a similar situation in India likewise where the empowerment of women has received priority on the nation's advancement agenda. The year 2001 was proclaimed as Women's Empowerment Year, though prior plans dealt with just welfare of women. The National Policy for Empowerment of women was introduced in India in 2001. To actualize it effectively, a National Plan for action for empowerment of women was implemented during 2003-04. A coordinated methodology for Women Empowerment with unequivocal objectives, targets and a time period had been incorporated in Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07). Since women empowerment depends not only on economic determinants but on social factors also, Government of India has brought fourth-three dimensional strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and provision for gender equality. The Government has taken a few activities including projects and strategies to guarantee this present system's. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Amendment Act, 2003, Sati Prevention Act, the Hindu Succession Act, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Various plans actualized under The Ministry of Women and Child Development like Swayamsiddha, Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP) and so on., Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (provides small scale credit), Kishori Shakti Yojana, Nutrition Program for pre-adult young ladies, are the couple of out of numerous means attempted by the Government to improve financial status and gender equality.

Strengthening legal system to eliminate discrimination against women and mainstreaming gender perspective in development process are the main objectives of the 11th Five Year Plan. The vision for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) is to guarantee improving the position and condition of ladies by addressing structural and institutional boundaries as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IME) etc. The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers.

CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ASSAM

Education is considered as a gateway towards empowerment. It produces opportunities and choices for women. Empowered women can play role in the social revolution because they know the roles and duties towards the society which leads to development. But due to various constraints and burden of responsibilities women do not able to step up towards the door of growth. Especially when it comes to the backward states their development gets a hindrance. Below mentioned are some of them.

- Gender discrimination is one of the biggest problem which female faces. Whether it is a home or workplace, from womb to tomb the subordination is prevailing.
- In Assam early marriage is one of the chief barriers which hinder the girl's further studies. The anxiety of parents towards the girl's future becomes hindrance in her development. It can be seen more in the rural areas where lack of awareness is existing.
- In the backward areas supplementing the basic needs, which can be fulfilled through earning of the family is more important rather than gaining education and moving towards empowerment. In such situation the education becomes burden on the family.
- The social discrimination also has its roots. Boys are always assets for the family and girl is liability, as a result of this no importance is given to the education of girls.
- Traditional values and norms also play an important role. All the sacrifices are done by women only because of the patriarchal society. Women are supposed to keep all the religious beliefs of the generation. These values lead them to be more subordinate towards men.
- The prevailing notion among the society is that women solely can look after the household work and also take care of her children. This conception increases her burden of double work and ultimately women do not get time for her who again results into health issues.

HEALTH SCHEMES FOR WOMEN:

There are several schemes for women in Assam which is for the benefit of women, they are centrally and state sponsored. Below are the schemes which focus on the issues of health, education, employment and other advantages for women. Janani Surkha Yojana (JSY) is an Indian Government scheme and it was launched on 12th April 2005 by the Prime Minister of India. Its aim is to reduce the neo-natal and maternal deaths happening in the country by promoting institutional delivery of new born. Mamoni Scheme: The Assam government introduced the Mamoni scheme in the state under the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM). The aim of the scheme is to reduce Maternal Mortality Ratio. This scheme encourages the expectant women to undergo 3 ante-natal checkups so that any danger indication could be detected during pregnancy at earliest and proper treatment could be offered. The pregnant woman also receives 1000 rupees. Majani Scheme: Through this schemes government has inspired the parents having female child. An amount of rupees 3000 has been fixed during the birth of the female children and whenever she will attain 18 years, she will get this money. The "Janani Sishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)" also provides for free transport from home to institution, between facilities in case of a recommendation and a drop back home. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) being implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neo-natal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among the poor pregnant women. Swadhar: The Ministry of Women and Child Development under Government of India set up a scheme for women in difficult circumstance known as Swadhar. The main objective of the scheme is to focus on the marginalized and the poor girls living in the difficult circumstances. The scheme provides basic needs like food, shelter and also the economic and social support. The schemes which are introduced are for the betterment of the women and to improve their health conditions. The health status of women can become better if they utilizes the government schemes at its best, but that also needs the awareness generation among them. The health service distribution system needs to be stronger at the ground level. The staff at the ground level needs to be strengthen so that qualitative output can be achieved. If we talk about the modern term 'Globalization' that will be best suited in the developed countries, since when we talk about the developing countries and the backward regions like Assam, then it will not help the poor women where lack of awareness and illiteracy is persisting. Therefore an attempt has been made to see rural women's health aspects at a better position by the government. Women participation in every field is necessary. Empowered women have the freedom to do choices and take their own decision which later converts into capacity building and helpful for the state and the nation. Assam poses sometimes doubts on the efficacy of the empowerment variable. This is because of the actuality that strong family-based construction of Indian politics makes it difficult for women to emphasize independent or self governing political choices, as distinct from the male headed families or patriarchy. (Purusottam Nayak, Bidisha Mahanta, 201 2) .Even employment is the important indicator of empowerment. If, the women is employed the sense of independence will arise which would help women to build their skills. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society.

SUGGESTIONS

Government should take appropriate steps with the participation of masses in order to bring the girl child to the main stream of education. The policies which are designed should go hand in hand. Every woman related issues are important to consider by increasing their collective power. The parents of girl child belonging to poor families must be specially educated to understand the importance of education for their girl child as base for women empowerment. To construct consciousness concerning rights and responsibilities relating to laws governing to women's status in the society. To help women to achieve financial feasibility through literacy. Women to be given social security. The implementation at the ground level needs to be strengthening and the research gaps needs to be identified so that utmost women can contribute. Societal attention ought to be given to women in the complicated and difficult circumstances like domestic violence, social discrimination, early marriage, dowry etc. Persuade changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance so as be gender just. Any policies or programmers which are framing even at the grassroots level should be gender just. Building a constructive image of women in the society and recognizing their contribution in social, economic and political sphere. The feedback system should be made compulsory so that timely responses and the opinion of the women can help in improving the status. If possible, media campaigns should also be done highlight the issues of women. Others will also understand the importance of it. Revolving funds can be helpful for the microenterprise development.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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