

Empowerment Of Women And The Role Of Public Policy

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Abstract: The concept of empowerment of women is of recent origin. It has been given currency by U.N. agencies during recent years. 'Empower' means to make one powerful or equip one with the power to face the challenge of life to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities. It is an active multi-dimensional process which would enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It demands a basic change in the social system. The philosophy of women's empowerment needs a total rehauling of the Indian society.

Keywords: Gender, Femininity, Empowerment, sacrifice, Injustice, Movement

I. INTRODUCTION

Man and woman are like two wings of bird, which only in unison can take a lofty flight. Unfortunately for our society, one of these wings is wounded and weak. Women, who is the mother, carrier and procreator of all human stands defeated, humiliated and over-powered by her own creation-the man proving true the philosophical formulation of the giant of the social scientists- Karl Marx that every matter contains the seed of its own destruction. If the society goes on denying the rights to its procreator woman, it wouldn't take too long to destroy the race 'woman' from face of the Earth. Although, gender injustices is a global phenomenon, unfortunately eastern countries especially India has surpassed many others in this regard. Though, very interestingly, both in western and oriental thought, the pages of History are repleted with various names presenting a golden picture of women in different phases of History. To illustrate, Sita, Damyanti, Savitri, Kunti, Draupadi, Gargi, Maitreyi, Laxmibai, Chand bibi, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi, Kiran Bedi, Kalpana Chawla, Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva etc. but this presents only one side of the story, shedding light on the half truth. The other side presents a very gloomy picture relegating the notion that 'The present century belongs to women' to the dust.

II. GENESIS OF PROBLEM

A chill runs down our spine when cases of a number of callous and inhuman practices prevailing in several countries impinging on females flashed nearly everyday in newspapers, or channels. Instances of female infanticide, foeticide, sex-abuse, sex-tourism, molestation, domestic-violence, immoral trafficking, dowry, bride-burning are enough to set whirlpools of fear in our blood. All this compels us to turn our eyes and ears to Lamartine words that there is a woman at the beginning of all great things. Then the question is- why the worse is inflicted to the initiator of greatest things?

Demure, diffident, soft, sensitive-these words have epitomised femininity since time immemorial. A woman is a sacrifice personified. This creation of misconception about women's fragility, delicacy, and feminine charm has been furthered by poetry, literature and sculpture. Secondly, our society has been mired in tradition for so long that we have internalised values which have time and again led to the suffering of women. The social, economic, legal and political institutions have at different levels furthered patriarchy which is interwoven into warp and woof of our cultural fabric. The fictitious differences between 'he' and 'she' have belittled and disparaged women folk in India regardless of their religion, caste or creed. All this has annihilated her identity as a free

individual. Thirdly, by targeting women as the centre of consumeristic society reducing her as commodities to be traded in the international markets both overtly and covertly leaving no space from the commercialization of women's charm and vulnerability. The day women understand this, it will definitely change the contours of the world economics that day. Thus, with all pretensions to morality and piety, we treat the female species as no more than a commodity. The question is "Does she have any honourable place in the society?" A capital 'No' is the answer.

And finally, the most unfortunate reality is the inherent hatred of women towards women. The genesis dates back to the civilizational history, women lost trust in their own kind, after having undergone the same physical, mental torture and degradation when they were young and vulnerable. Their experience taught them to confine their progenies and young ones to home and house chores, gradually resulting into the custom of indoor responsibility, falling into women's care and outdoor for men. In course of time, reproduction, domestic-work and child-rearing became the exclusive responsibility of women. All these three activities are so time-consuming and engaging that it leaves them no time and space for education and self-development.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST MOVEMENT

With the ushering of democracy, all round development of the society was given the topmost priority in the West, creating space for women to question their fundamental rights for liberty, equality and freedom. Women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Madam Mary Curie, Florence Nightingale were among the first to set the ball rolling for greater participation of women in all walks of life. Consequently, women per se gained movement during 70s which culminated into feminist movement in 1975. The material prosperity which generated from capitalism was instrumental in orienting women to question their stakes in the prosperity of their society and economy paving the way for socialistic reforms in the European societies from back doors making capitalism more human and acceptable system. Subsequently, women were declared equal to men in intelligence, skill and competence; hence equality in wages, opportunities, status (social, economic and political) became the watch words of the feminist movement. It led to the emergence of the concept of 'Empowerment of Women'.

IV. CONCEPT OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The concept of empowerment of women is of recent origin. It has been given currency by U.N. agencies during recent years. 'Empower' means to make one powerful or equip one with the power to face the challenge of life to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities. It is an active multi-dimensional process which would enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist in providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision-making, greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the

circumstances that influence their lives and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

Empowerment does not mean setting women against men. Indeed, it means making both men and women realise their changing roles and status and develop a consensus for harmonious living in the context of an egalitarian society. It means redistribution of work roles, re-orienting their values to the changing world and attitudes and evolving new kinds of adjustments, understanding and trust with each other. It is a new ideology for carrying democratic values into the family and society. It demands a basic change in the social system. The philosophy of women's empowerment needs a total rehauling of the Indian society.

V. STRATEGIES OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of women can be achieved by focussing on the following strategies:

The emergence of understanding that the full participation of women in every sphere is inevitable for the society to bloom to fullest. It must be internalized that causing women's participation and empowerment is not an alm being doled out by the men; rather it is their only solace to grow, mature and realize their own potentialities.

Based on this fundamental, multi-faceted actions need to be initiated at all levels towards women empowerment. One vital dimension of this is women's economic independence. Economically self-reliant woman act as a self-generating dynamo fostering the goals of family planning and self-development. For this skill development programmes, entrepreneurial development programmes and micro-finance schemes need to be implemented sincerely, up till the remotest corners of the country. Granting land rights to women, in policy as well as practice, would be another crucial step. All these have the ability to totally transform the values, psyche and economy of our entire society. It could take to great heights the benefits already being reaped by causing women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions.

Another important dimension of women's empowerment is their health. This neglect of women's empowerment is their health. This neglect of women's health has continued in spite of its overarching influence on the health of the entire family. Increasing number of women falling victims to HIV/AIDS, mostly passed on by their unfaithful husbands, besides female foeticide continuing full blown, despite all prohibitions on PNDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Test) present a horrifying reality. If these continue a little while, all doors would be slammed upon any possibility of deliverance of the humanity. Sufficient number of trained health professionals and NGO's need to come up to take charge of even the remotest of villages to pull the women out of their ignorance, inhibitions and diseases.

Above all, the key to achieving high standards in women's empowerment lies in women's education. Women need to be made aware of their rights and duties by incorporating these in formal and non-formal education system, imparted free and compulsory. Mobilisation of grass-root women is the only tool to empower women as a whole. Though a lot has been done, yet we have to go a long way to

make women's empowerment a living reality. It is the strong and effective people's campaign and people's movement, which is urgently needed to take place along with the other movements already in operation to bring about real empowerment of women. The urgent need of the hour is a revolution in thinking and an awakening of the collective consciousness of people. In the final analysis, women's empowerment can be achieved only with the change of heart, attitude and behaviour of people.

VI. CONCLUSION

The ultimate truth is that each of us has both a man and a woman in us. When we neglect and disrespect the women around, we unconsciously do the same with the feminine attributes within ourselves- attributes as love, compassion, kindness, care and empathy. We must know that for our

infiniteness to blossom, both of these aspects should manifest themselves to the fullest. Only then we can get to the divinity within and without. Only then, we can realize the dream of a world full of love, peace and happiness.

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