
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THE INDIAN EXPERIMENT

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Abstract: Empowerment is concerned with changing the power relations between individuals and groups in society. Power is perceived as the degree of control over the resources exercised by different section of society.

(C. Hemlata Prasad 2006). These resources of assets could be broadly categorized in to the following five groups.

- (1) Physical resources (land, water, forest etc)
 - (2) Human resources (People, their labor and skills etc)
 - (3) Intellectual resources (Knowledge, information, Ideas etc)
 - (4) Social resources (Social capital)
 - (5) Financial resources (Money, access to money)
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Introduction: This power is dynamic and relational. It is not absolute. Power is exercised in the social, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. It is unequally distributed among the people and gender groups.

Women Empowerment Women empowerment is broadly described as a process as well as the outcome of the process by which women gain greater control over resources - Physical, human, financial and intellectual. Further women empowerment challenges the ideology of patriarchy and the gender based discrimination against the women in all the institutions and structures of society.

The process of women empowerment must begin in the mind by changing the women's consciousness. It comprehends changing women's beliefs about herself and her rights, capacities and potentials enabling her to acknowledge and rejoice in her strength, knowledge, intelligence and skills. Women's empowerment must become a political force if is to transform society at large. Mass movements and organizations of poor women can bring about the fulfillment of women's as practical & Strategic needs. They can define power as constructing a new society in which the potential of every human being can be realized without regard to gender, race, class, caste, ethically or region.

Dimensions of women empowerment: Women Empowerment has two dimensions -static and dynamic Static empowerment of women relates to their capacity to participate in decision making that affects their lives and to influence those decisions. Women will have an affective voice in this context.

The dynamic concept of empowerment as a process of developing capacity of individuals to participate effectively in making and implementing decisions that directly or indirectly affect them

Gender Inequality and equity: The need for Women Empowerment in India

Gender discrimination in India today is one of the most all pervading forms of deprivation. Gender violence both societal as well as domestic continues unabated. Most women continue to be excluded from decision making process. The exclusion pervades all level Government, corporate, Societal and house hold.

Lack of access to social entitlement further exacerbates

poverty. Women survive in marginalized state of existence. Low self esteem institutionalized subordination in society, ignorance of laws and above all threats of violence creates vicious intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. Deprivation is aggravated by lack of education information and lack of training and low level of literary.

Women comprise half of humanity. They contribute 2/3 rd of world's work hours but earns only 1/3 rd of total income and own less than 1/10 of worlds resources. Women continue to be in marginal employment and low level of skills.

Their contribution is largely invisible. The present construction of gender largely relegates women to the inside sphere .Reproduction and responsibilities of nurturance management of a fragile environment and low paid or unpaid but heavy work responsibilities in agriculture, after husbandry and other traditional factors creates a syndrome gender stereotypes, marginalization, alienation and deprivation (Fourth world conference on women Govt of India country Report 1995)Towards Women Empowerment in India

The constitutional amendment Act.(73rd & 74th) constitute a watershed for the advancement of Indian women. They ensure 1/3 of total elected seats and positions of chairpersons in rural and urban local elected bodies to women. About one million women are estimated to emerge as leaders of the grass roots level in the rural areas alone. Of these 75000 shall be chairpersons.

The constitution of India grants equality to women and it also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. This is intended for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic educational and political disadvantages faced by them. The constitutional mandate under (Article) 14 confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in political, economic and social spheres while Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc. A provision under Article 15(3) enables the state to allow affirmative discrimination in favor of women. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment.

Political Empowerment: The Indian constitution is one of the most progressive in the world. It guarantees

equal right for men & women. However Indian women are still waiting anxiously for their dreams of equality to be translated into reality.

Political power is the strongest tool to eradicate inequality. The constitutional amendment bill which aims at ensuring 33% reservation for women in all legislative bodies including the lok sabha has resulted in a unique situation. Reservation at panchayats level is implemented in all states. As a result nearly one million women have entered the sphere of public decision making.

Democratic and secular India endeavors to provide necessary conditions for greater participation of women in all spheres of life. Equality of opportunity is guaranteed and discrimination on gender of sex, language, religion, class or creed is prohibited. Challenges in seeking to reduce inequality in a diverse and complex country like India are enormous. They are related to overcoming attitudinal, institutional, cultural & social restrictions. The committee on status of women in India has observed all the indicators of participation attitudes and impact come up with the same results of the revolution in social and political status of women for which constitutional equality was to be only the means - still remains a very distant objective. The large masses of women continue to lack spokes persons who understand their special problems and are committed to their removal in the respective bodies of the state. Participation of women is the integral part of democratic process. Women constitutes half of the population hence they must be in decision making in all the socio-economic and political organizations.

Women empowerment & participation is a political question linked to change in power relations. Through mutually supportive process of political empowerment which has largely failed to tap the emergency, knowledge and ability of women. Women have been in the forefront in mass movement but their presence has not been felt strongly in structural decision making in the institutions. They have held position of power as prime minister or chief minister. But they have not been able to change the lives of the mass of women working in a predominately patriarchal structure with no gender sensitivity. It has made it difficult to bring about real and sustained changes for women.)

In India political empowerment coincides with the limited franchise granted to women in 1937. In the post independence period the Indian constitution granted equal voting right. Women have been participatory in political process as voters, as candidates, contesting election, in deliberations in the state assemblies and the National parliaments. They have held public office at deferent levels.

Participation of Women in Elections and Elected Bodies: Participation of women in elections depends on the mobilization of the political party's, general awareness among the community of the importance of voting and the overall political culture. Political parties

not made any serious efforts to mobilize women as a political constituency. Women are often projected as not being interested in and uninformed about political matters. The number of women contestant in parliamentary elections has not increased over the years. However there is a greater representation to women in Rajyasabha. Women members are found to participate more in women issues-health, welfare, atrocities against women, crimes like dowry & violation of women right etc. There is gender discrimination in relation to nomination of women to contest election to the state legislature. Women ministers are often given welfare oriented portfolios-women & child development, culture & youth. Maximum number of women at decision making levels have been in the welfare and development oriented sectors or human resource development which includes education, culture, women & child development. Only 5.71% of the total number of persons in administrative service are women.

Women in Panchayats Raj Institutions: The three tier system of local governance from the village to the district level has been mandatory as per the 73rd constitutional amendment Act 1993. All the State legislatures have been directed to amend their respective legislations to conform to the constitutional amendment within one year.

Each panchayat is to have a uniform five years term & elections are to be held to constitute new bodies before the term expires. In all panchayats seats are to be reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their number in the population. One third of the total number of seats is reserved for women. One third of the chair persons of panchayats at all levels are to be women.

The following figures indicate the number of women representatives anticipated to emerge as a result of the amendment Act.

Strategic Approach for Women Empowerment:

Women empowerment strategy is emerging as a unique. Indian response to the challenges of equality, development & peace. There is need for providing an expanding networking of support service so that women are freed from some of their gender related shackles. The following measures are required for empowerment of women in different areas viz.

- Economic Empowerment: Women should be provided with additional channels of credit, training, employment, greater visibility, management skill & Social security.
- Political empowerment: There is need for resorting to different forms of affirmative discrimination so that women's voice is heard.
- Access to knowledge, power and resources women should be empowered to demand such education, knowledge & resources.

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