



Understanding Women Empowerment Through Gender Subordination and Gender Equality

Topu Choudhury Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chilarai College, Golakganj, Dhubri, Assam India, PIN-783334.

Abstract:

In recent years, empowerment of women has been a matter of crucial importance in most of the governments of the world. A framework to study women's empowerment vis-à-vis women's status has to follow from a clear understanding of gender equality. Studying women's empowerment means a careful recognition of the essence of gender subordination through the study of gender relations. It also reveals the exercise of consideration derived from a articulated goal of equality. This paper is based on theoretical study and attempts to understand women empowerment through the various facets of gender subordination and gender equality.

Keywords: Empowerment; Status; Gender; Essence; Subordination.

Introduction:

The concept equality has been significant to the explanation of the term "Women's Empowerment" as articulated logically by many feminists. The Feminist understanding of empowerment includes power to and power from within. Empowerment process will take a form which arises out of a particular cultural, ethnic, historical, economical, geographical, political and social location, specific life experience and out of the interaction of all the above with gender relations prevailing in society. As far as women empowerment is concerned, the National Policy of Education, Government of India (1986) mentioned that women would become empowered through collective reflection and decision making. The parameters of women empowerment are building a positive self identity and self confidence, developing the ability to think critically, ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change in society.

The concept of equality, articulated so coherently by many third world feminists, has been significant to the exposition of the term "women empowerment", as evidenced in the writings of many feminists. The emerging body of knowledge to which Northern feminists have also contributed has been pivotal in providing clarity about means and ends and frameworks to assess means and more significantly women's issues are also being articulated increasingly in the writings of rights. Feminist discourse which draws upon the concept of human rights has brought into focus the

responsibility of the nation state in creating and sustaining conditions that enable the achievement of gender equality.

A framework to study women's status has to follow from a clear understanding of gender equality. Studying women's status means a sensitive diagnosis of the nature of gender subordination through the study of gender relations in a specific context. It also means the application of measures derived from a clearly articulated goal of equality. To that context, when we look into the gender relation, it is evident that men are favored by the rules of the already existing institutions within which gender relations occur and that they enjoy and exercise power in commanding these resources. This symmetry remains unquestionable and definite because men are in a position of dominance and women of subordination.

The concept of gender equality, therefore anticipated the women empowerment which is twofold- Empowerment that is externally induced process and a process that may be termed as Self- empowerment. The former process signifies the removal of hurdles to as well as the encouragement of women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, equipment, housing, etc. that enable women to arise their self reliance. While the latter process denotes to an amicable atmosphere where a women find a "time and space" of their own and begin to reconsider their lives critically and collectively.

Aspects of Gender Subordination and Gender Equality:

Women are generally considered biologically weaker sex and primarily the producers of human society. Pregnancy is a period of rest and physical disability. The human infant depends upon the mother for a long period for being brought up. This fundamental and biologically anchored for woman led to the argument that society is based on sexual division of labour, i.e., men generally being endorsed with aggressive and domineering characteristics are fit for physically arduous and outdoor tasks whereas the women are bound to pursue home bound and less physically arduous tasks. And this is the only practical and efficient way of organizing human societies without any overlapping and confusion in social roles of men and women (Bhagwan and Bhusan, 2005, 569).

The consequences of the traditional subordination of women may be regarded as 'natural', 'unchangeable' and 'unbroken social arrangements'. Traditional gender relations restricted almost all women irrespective of class, caste or communities access to land, housing and control over property, thereby transforming them to extreme vulnerable. In many parts of India, women inherit land and other properties through marriages but still women enjoy a little claim or no claim over those assets. The social arrangements have been formed only to favour men with regard to the right of inheritance. The control over resources and management is determined by men only.

Women's access to education is also hindered by several factors. It is constrained by cultural factor, withdrawal of girl children due to economic hardship or for caring of younger brothers and sisters or to manage the male education in poor families. One of the tragedies of the deprivation of women education is the need to pay huge amount of dowry in order to get a more educated groom that compelled parental decision to withdraw the girl from formal education. This is generally applicable to the remote areas of the society. However, women's education is considered as a lesser quality to marriage in most of the parts of India even today.

The empowerment of women cannot be accelerated without considering the economic dependence which is very crucial to achieve gender equality. Patriarchal ideology not only creates an intra-house hold division of labour but the burden of the household falls on women as if it were natural. Women find it extremely difficult to take up production work outside the home; however, when financial conditions deteriorate, it is women's labour that often comes to rescue of the household (A. Sarma). They have no choice but to work outside the home, continue fulfilling their responsibilities of the household and also bear children. Change in gender relation in the public sphere may seem an attainable goal for many women, but the family still remains the last frontier of male domination.

Without attaining political power, no society can claim to have given equal status to women. The entry of women into politics has been an encouraging step towards their empowerment. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has created spaces for women to participate in local self government – Rural and Urban governance. The Act provided 33% reservation for women may open up certain opportunities for enhanced political participation. Though under the provision of 73rd CAA, only 33 percent reservation is made to women, but Bihar, the first state in India to reserve 50 percent of the Panchayat seats for women. This bold step of Bihar was followed by Sikkim, which increased their reservations for women to 40 percent. More states like the Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand have already passed laws increasing the reservations for women in Panchayats to 50 percent and accordingly Panchayat elections were held at those states with the new arrangements (Nupur Tiwari). Assam has also conducted the last Panchayat election in 2018 by providing 50 percent reservation of seats for women. The main motive behind increasing the percentage of seats for women in local bodies in a bid to empower women socially and politically. Though the percentage for reservation is an arbitrary figure, but it is sufficient enough to make the change evident and visible. It is impediment for women to enter into political affairs for the cause of suitable change in gender relations and their status.

The concept of women empowerment has become a centre point in the larger political scenario. The participatory politics has been immensely contributed by it. In the context of India, basically after the Indian independence various developments have taken place in the field of participatory politics of women. Very

recently, the 108th Constitutional amendment bill of 2008 proposed to 33% reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and all State assemblies. The bill was passed in Rajya Sabha on 9th March 2009 but never voted in Lok Sabha. The truth is that empowerment should entail a power to participate in the decision making process in all spheres of society, with no separation of the public and private and in all social, economic, political and cultural processes. The capacity and capabilities of women mostly remain unrecognized and their contributions remain unnoticed.

A. Sarma observes that not only in the political field only, but women from all communities are at the mercy of unjust religious laws that govern their lives. Political party, particularly in power is resisted to step on the area of a common civil code due to political consequences. The Constitution of India provided the right to non-discrimination on the basis of sex and specifically considers the requirement for special provision for women in regard of continuing gender based inequalities between men and women. The Directive Principles of State Policy incorporated in the Constitution of India are a significant and fundamental part of the framework of governance in the country. But there is no definite mechanism or a process to secure that the state acts intrinsically upon these principles or guidelines.

The most savage facet of gender subordination is perhaps the women's lack of control over their own bodies. In most parts of India even today, the womenfolk do not enjoy the right to decision regarding their own marriage. In early ages, women are being married to older person; so called cultural doctrine boost parents who give marriages of their daughters even as they are children. Moreover, it is the woman who bears the pain of carrying child in their womb for nine months, they are more familiar with the problems of giving birth a baby, therefore it is the women who should give the call for having a child. To that context, women should have the right to abortion. But in reality due to gender subordination, women lack the power of abortion and the decision is vested upon the hands of the male.

Conclusion:

Today many women activists, women representatives (local or national), women organizations and women academics are working in close collaboration for women empowerment. They are helping women by providing legal awareness recourses, legal aid programme etc. However, such kind of awareness campaign is very rare in remote places. They are often so unaware of their fundamental freedoms that the notion of 'rights' is for them an alien concept. They tend to be much more conversant with the concepts of responsibilities and obligations.

The concept of gender superiority is still the uppermost in man's mind. Unless, this is changed and both men and women take to revised values, in respect of gender power relationship, issue of status of women will continue to be assessed traditionally and not by social change. Lots of work need to be done related to the women

empowerment in a plural society like India, if history's longest oppression is to be seriously tackled.

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