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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: STRUGGLE AND CHALLENGES IN NEW MILLENNIUM

Dr. Maitreyini G. Gadigeppagoudar

Assistant Professor, School of Classical Kannada Studies,
Rani Channama University, Vidyasangama, Belagavi,
Karnataka, India.

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment itself says, to give official authority or legal power to women. Every human has equal authority and rights in this world. Violence against women in India is an issue rooted in society's norms and economic dependence. It can be viewed in this article that women struggle and resistance, gender discrimination in working place, decline in political participation of women and their challenges. Why we should empower women, is to empower women through Self Help Groups.

KEYWORDS :Empowerment, rights, Discrimination, resistance, challenges, SHG

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford dictionary defines empowerment as to make someone stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights. Basically women empowerment refers to the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women empowerment is today of the main topics that is discussed throughout the world. Thus it is a globally concerned topic. The United Nations development programme constituted eight Millennium Development goals (MDG) for ensuring equity & peace across the world. The third MDG is related to the empowerment of women in India. Ministry for women and child development has put forward many programmes which are essentially working to empower women. Apart from these it is the responsibility of every citizen to think "THINK, ACT AND REACT".



STRUGGLE:

Violence against women in India is an issue rooted in society's norms and economic dependence. Discriminatory practices are underlined by laws favouring men. Inadequate policing and judicial practices deny female victims proper protection and justice. Although female participation in public life is increasing and laws have been amended. India still has a long way to go to make Indian women equal citizens in their own country. Nevertheless some numbers clearly indicate a large problem in Indian society's attitude of women indicates 940 women to a 1000 Men. This is a definite improvement over the 2001 census. Where ratio was 933:1000. however India still has one of the lowest sex ratios in the world with approximately 35 million women missing. The highest number of missing

women at birth is in the north-western states of Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana, etc.

1) GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN WORKING PLACE: Discrimination in the corporate world is abundant. Women face discrimination in different jobs and in different sectors and industries. People hold a stereotype for women and they feel that women are not suitable for sales jobs as it demands travelling to unknown places, speaking to unknown people, working late night. Women may be treated in an unfair way and seniors/boss may take undue advantage of some situation women may be in and this often results in sexual harassment at workplace. Even though there are laws protecting women at workplace, women often face problems like.

- 1) Sexual harassment.
- 2) Gender based discrimination.
- 3) Withholding promotions based on gender.
- 4) Salary discrimination.
- 5) Neglecting women at workplace.

2) DECLINE IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: India is one among the commonwealth countries with the lowest percentage of women (below 10%) in politics. It may be due to the unwillingness on the part of governance to select women to these positions, or due to a feeling of insecurity in women to handle these positions for which reason they might not come forward. Cultural norms continue to dictate that the role of women at the work place is seen as secondary to her role at home as a nurturer and home maker.

However, that women have the potential, to contribute effective skill and management in public sphere is an acknowledged fact and effort have to be made to meet this challenge. Majority of people are unaware of the role played by the women in major scientific breakthrough historically. In the mean time the world however, is changing at a speed never dreamt of into a single compact family easily communicate with one another. Gender relationship is changing in a new matrix. The concept of womanhood is changing gradually but all these have thrown a new challenge to the women professionals.

To face these new challenges, women professionals in public sphere needs to have new strengths and spirits.

- 1) Make your work visible that which is invisible.
- 2) Articulate your judgement that which unarticulated earlier
- 3) Redefine yourself and other women.
- 4) Own the disowned inner asset and skill.

CHALLENGES:

1) EDUCATION: While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned. The gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

2) POVERTY: Poverty is considered as the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a natural goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

3) HEALTH AND SAFETY: The health and safety concern of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a

country and is important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

4) PROFESSIONAL INEQUALITY: This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environments in government offices and private enterprises.

5) MORALITY AND INEQUALITY: Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and china.

6) HOUSEHOLD INEQUALITY: Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

REASON WHY WE SHOULD EMPOWER WOMEN:

Empowering women is the key to building a future that we aspire for. Female influence provides the bed rock of a family's structure and success. The popular UNSECO slogan can be quoted here. "Educate a man, you educate an individual". "Educate a woman, you educate a family". As a mother, farmer, teacher and an entrepreneur, a woman can impact the society and bring in the necessary change. She becomes the guiding force to empower others.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS (SHG):

CONCEPT:

SHG is a voluntary association of persons with common interest formed and managed by democratically without any political affiliation. It is a homogeneous group of not more than 20, who join on voluntary basis in order to undertake some common activity through mutual trust and mutual help.

The origin of SHG claimed to be the brain child of Grameena bank of Bangladesh founded by Prof. Mohammed Yunus (father of the "Micro-credit system") of Chittagang University, Bangladesh, in the year 1975. SHGs are been functional in 52 countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Korea, Philippines and Indonesia for a long time.

In India, the concept of SHGs for banking, finance and development was worked by the RBI from 1991 onwards, while NABARD initiated its own effort in 1886-87. In 1999 RBI set up a Micro-credit cell to make it easier for micro credit providers to pursue the institutional development process. Therefore, micro credit system had been considered as an important instrument to provide credit for self-employment and other financial and business services, including savings and technical assistance to very poor persons.

Formation of SHGs has greatly helped rural women to know their rights, access to information economical independence, freedom of expression, confidence building, access of credit, improving their personality and respect in the society etc. Since the overall empowerment of women is crucially dependent on economic empowerment, these SHGs could generate income and employment to build their empowerment. It has contributed to a reduced dependency on informal moneylenders and other non-institutional sources. SHGs empowered women and trained them to take active part in socio-economic progress of the nation.

SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN:

1) National commission for women: In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards

provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

2)Reservation for women in local Self-Government: The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies, whether in rural areas or urban areas.

3)The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000): The plan of action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

4)National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2011: The Department of women & child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude I would like to say that women are one of the pillar of society and she acts as mother, daughter, wife, sister. It would be difficult to imagine the society without her presence. Now days, she has become part of process in nation building and also she is getting good status and respect in society, gradually, she is getting knowledge of her rights and opportunity. But in my opinion. She should get her complaints/problems to be solved with early response and Honourable courts and Government should give preference to solve her legal suits through special courts and court sessions.

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