

Role of the Education for the Empowerment of Women

Fr. Thomas Parathara*

Introduction

Globalization has presented new challenges in the realization of the goal of empowering women and now women empowerment has become the slogan and motto of many social reformers, governmental agencies and voluntary organizations. There is a long cherished wish among all the women to have better avenues in life in order to lead the life in a more fruitful way. However, the concept 'women empowerment' is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enables them to move forward in life with greater dignity and self-assurance. In fact an empowered woman is a nation's strength. The united nation's organization had declared the year 1975 as women's year and the decade 1975 – 1985 as women's decade on an international level. It enabled economists and social scientists to unveil many issues related to women. So various studies were conducted and led to the consensus that so long as women remain oppressed and inhibited, no nation can enjoy freedom and justice. It is found that when half of the population is denied the opportunities for utilizing their full potential, the economic parameters like growth, development and welfare remain undefined. So various steps were taken to define the concept of women empowerment and to find out ways through which women can be empowered.

Terminology

The word empowerment is widely used in relation to women. Very often it is used as a substitute for women's welfare, development of women, upliftment of women and participation of women. But the concept of empowerment is not synonymous with these words. It is a broader concept.

The terminology of empowerment has arisen from the theoretical debates as well as practical debates especially from the experience of women

working at the grass root level in many parts of the world. In 1990s when terms like participation, consultation and partnership began to enter the development thinking importance given by development agencies was shifted to enabling approach, enabling people to identify and express their needs and priorities. It is in this context the notion of empowerment has arisen.

The dictionary meaning of the term empowerment is to give power, to give them capacity to perform some physical or mental activity, to delegate authority, to give legal rights, to enable, to endow.

Giffe Soresen and Helle Poulsen defined empowerment as "gaining autonomy and control over one's life. The empowered become agencies of their own development, are able to exercise choices, set their own agenda, and are capable of challenging and changing their subordinate position in society. Divya Panday defines it as a process of building capacities and confidence for taking decisions about – one's own life at – an individual and collective level and gaining control over productive resources that are developed and built. The empowerment-process is facilitated by creating awareness about one's rights and responsibilities and socio – economic educational and political opportunities, by developing skills for utilizing productive resource and by involving oneself in collective activities and community life.

Aim of Empowerment

If the aim of the empowerment is transforming the society, then it should be undertaken as a political movement by challenging the existing power structure and gender relations which oppress and subordinate the women. It should generate a new structure of power which involves equity, sharing, giving, creating and developing the potentiating of every human being, as the present structure of power is hierarchical, exploitative,

*Assumption College Changanacherry, Kottayam (District), Kerala.

destructive and aggressive . It should not lead to taking over the men's power and perpetuate the same exploitative and hierarchical structure. It should create a world of equality and make best use of potentiality of all human beings in constructing the more human world.

The process of empowerment cannot take place all of a sudden. It passes through various stages, like in the first stage women try to look into the situation from a different perspective , recognize the power structure and other institutional norms which subordinate them by keeping themselves away from them. In this stage they also try to share their feelings and experience with other women and realize that it is not single women's experience but common to all.

In the second stage they try to change the situation and structure which are against to them. They point out the injustice done to them but also resist them. Here they get support and strength from collective action.

In the third stage, they become more mature and realize that they are and how they are is not their fate but it is imposed on them, they lack something and they have to gain it, for that they need to work. They cultivate confidence in themselves. Collective empowerment of women would shift the direction and process of development to women's needs and their demand. It would bring with it individual empowerment of women not merely for individual advancement but for the advancement of society as a whole.

Empowerment may also bring negative impacts. It would bring conflict between men and women while changing the gender relations. Men will have to lose something, which they are having and enjoying since a long time so in the process of empowerment if women gain something, men have to lose something.

Empowerment of women may result in the emergence of a single big mass group to protect the democratic values to fight against the social evil, to fight for social justice, to work for the cause of all those who are deprived of it. But the way of empowerment – is not free from hurdles –

patriarchal norms, traditional beliefs, economic system, political condition make the task of empowering women more complicated. Since patriarchy is found to be very deeply entrenched both in men and women, empowering women has become an extremely complex task. Achieving gender equality and changing the present – gender relations requires widespread changes in the thinking and structure of every institution in the society. Women's empowerment can only be achieved through integrated and synergetic thinking and action.

The empowerment of women implies a positive role and participation of women in national development not only their own behalf but for the benefit of society at large. Empowerment of women enhances their ability to make choices within the family and in the society.

Role of Education for the empowerment of Women

Various writers highlight the role of education for the empowerment of women according to the International Encyclopedia on Women (1999) in the programme of the international conference on population and development, education is considered as one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge skill and self-confidence. Education plays an important role in bringing awareness about women's rights and is an effective means to counter gender discrimination and enhance the status of women.

Education is necessary to participate fully in development process. The national policy on education (1986) emphasized the promotion of women's education in all fields of learning to eliminate any sex-based stereotyping with the guarantee of equality before the law and the emphasis on girls education. Since employment plays a vital role in improving women's status in society education of women is of prime importance in any women empowerment programme. According to Rameshwari Pandya Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems.

Education as a means to promote development in social, political and economic spheres has been gender blind, but in late 1970s this perspective changed. A large number of studies and research concerning this subject followed and concluded the existence of a high correlation between increase in women's schooling level and a decline in infant – mortality and fertility rates. Education together with reproductive health is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge , skills and confidence, necessary to participate in the development process. Education is a cornerstone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their lives' traditional oppressions and to change. Educating women benefits the whole of society. It has more significant impact on poverty and development than mens' education. It is also the most influential factor in improving child health and reducing infant mortality.

Empowerment consists of various levels and dimensions. There is a need to empower women at both individual level and societal level. It is possible to empower women at individual level through formal education. Being able to read write and gain new knowledge , are important factors that enhance self-esteem of the individual and is a prerequisite for generating change and empowerment. Participation in education is an expression of psychological and cognitive components of the empowerment process – educated women become more capable of making important decisions concerning their family, social economical matters.

Women are builders of the nation right from early days is their homes and it is at their hands that children receive their first education. Mahatma Gandhi said that the home is the first university and parents, specially mothers, are the first teachers. Women as mother take care of their family, advise and guide their children and mould the character and personality of men. They are not only teachers of children performing all the domestic tasks but they also take part in various economic activities. In public life women are considered more competent and pragmatic than

men. They have been endowed with more responsibilities and rights.

In present society, capacity to understand the issues and problems facing the community and the ability to communicate one's idea to others are important qualities of a woman as a leader. Education is one of the means of acquiring such a capacity. Education for rural women representatives has great significance in view of the fact that they have become members of a very important institution. Educated or being literate helps them to understand roles and responsibilities with regard to Panchayat Raj. Education develops an insight and helps the representative in carrying out day to day life. Lack of education restrains the functioning of women is a leader. The confidence of illiterate women is generally low in comparison to literate women. She had lesser confidence in dealing or interacting with officials or any third person if she is not literate. As majority of women folk are illiterate or just literate, this drawback hinders their participation in the panchayat – activities, like conducting meetings, talking to government officials. It also makes them more dependent on men for paper work.

Education is a powerful tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women as it not only gives knowledge but also provides the necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenge of life. It also enables them to get a job and supplement the income of the family and achieve social status. Educated women could play an equally important role as men do in nation building.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is an essential element in national development. Since women constitute half of the population there can be no development unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. In fact , empowered women are a nation's strength. Since development means improvement in the living conditions of the society, as a whole, it is logical to expect that this also means improved status of women. The effective management and development of

women's resources, their capabilities, interest, skills and potentialities are of paramount importance for the mobilization of human resources. In the Indian social, cultural and economic context, no one can achieve the whole purpose of women's empowerment and emancipation within a short span of time. However, the women have utilized the chances given to them and made considerable progress. As formal agency, the government of India wanted to improve the living conditions of women all different times. Hence education play an important role for women empowerment.

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There are three things extremely hard, steel,
a diamond and to know one's self.

Bengamin Franklin

