

Women's Empowerment: A Critical Appraisal

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Holistic and critical empowerment of women (being 48 per cent of total population) is the need of the hour wherein all stakeholders should have synergy for concrete action on the ground, especially for security, inclusion & development and both women and men will have to work together in supplementary and collaborative partnership with each other. Undoubtedly women's emancipation should adapt a strategy of 'think globally, act locally'

French Revolution of 1789 is considered as the liberation of mankind but it did not liberate the women and slaves because its declaration focused only on 'Rights of Man and Citizen', while women and slaves were not included in the definition of 'citizen' and women were not 'men'. If we look at the male-female interaction in biological, social-cultural, economic, political and spatial dimensions, we find various forms rang from difference, distance, discrimination, deprivation to disempowerment, specially in the context of rural Indian society.

Male-female relationship is not egalitarian in India in different arenas of everyday life because males are considered 'be-all' and 'end-all' of family decisions. For instance, at national level, girls are lagging behind boys in school enrolment – 95.4 per cent in 6-9 years, 93.7 per cent in 10-14 years and 83.8 per cent in 15-17 years age groups. Top five States in girls' education are Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Jammu & Kashmir, while five bottom States are Rajasthan, Gujarat, Odisha, M.P. & U.P. Despite Equal Remuneration Act 1948, for the same work, women (cutting across all castes, regions and religions) are paid lower wages than men ranging from

20 per cent to 50 per cent. Second, this discrimination exists both in rural and urban areas though in urban areas a both males and females get more wages than in rural areas. Further, with the increase in the level of education, the wages of both men and women workers rise and the wage difference between the two sexes narrows down. There are three inter-related processes: a) feminisation of poverty; b) casualisation, informalisation and contractualisation of jobs, especially for women, and c) sexual exploitation of women- increasing trend of trafficking of girls/women, call girls and prostitutes multiplying.

The health situation of women is still not satisfactory in India; maternal mortality rate declined from 301 per lakh in India in 2000 to 167 in 2013 due to better medical facilities. However, thousands of women still die in delivery complications due to following major causes: Haemorrhage – 30 per cent, Anaemia – 19 per cent, Sepsis- 16 per cent, Obstructed labour – 10 per cent, Toxaemia – 8 per cent, Others – 17 per cent. This is due to poverty, unemployment, lack of awareness, and lack of medical facilities (less hospitals, beds, doctors, nurses, medicines etc.). Institutional deliveries, however, increased during 2006-2011 from 42 per cent to 84 per cent in India as a whole due to National Rural Health Mission.

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Next issue is the increasing crime rate against women in India, especially rape, kidnapping, molesting, eve-teasing, dowry deaths etc. In 2013, 3.095 lakh total crimes were reported against women but conviction rate was unsatisfactory – 22 per cent in 2013, 21 per cent in 2012 and 27 per cent in 2011 (then there were 500 fast track courts in 2011 against 212 such courts only in 2013-14). During 2001-13, there were 2.63 lakh rape cases registered in India and at every 20 minutes, one rape case occurs in India. Unfortunately 65 per cent cases of rape occur while women go to attend call of nature at night in India (still 50 per cent population goes for open defecation). Moreover, many such crimes are not reported to police stations due to lack of awareness, fear from the accused/criminals, non-cooperation of the local police, fear of bad name in community etc. Further, there is an increase in gang rape cases and often accompanied with murder of the female victims-Nirbhaya's gang rape and murder in New Delhi on 16th December 2012 led the mass participation in the protest and ultimately, the accused were awarded death sentence except one adolescent accused but their appeals are still pending in Supreme Court.

National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001):

This policy envisages to create Gender Development Indices (GDI) for better planning, programme formulation and adequate allocation of resources, and collection of gender disaggregated data. National Council (headed by Prime Minister) and State Council (headed by Chief Minister) *was to be* formed including representatives of concerned Depts/Ministries, National/State Commissions for Women, Social Welfare Boards, NGOs, women's organisations, trade unions, corporate sector, financing institutions, academics, experts etc. Women's Component Plan is to ensure 30 per cent of funds/ benefits flow to women from all Ministries/

Departments. Ministry of Women and Child Development was made the Nodal Ministry to review its progress. Highlights of Policy are:

- a) Advancement, development & empowerment of women in all spheres of life;
- b) More responsive judicial legal systems sensitive to women's needs;
- c) Women's equality in power-sharing and active participation in decision-making;
- d) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in development process;
- e) Strengthening & formation

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of relevant institutional mechanism;

- f) Partnership with community – based organisations and;
- g) Implementation of international obligations, commitments & cooperation at the international, national and sub-regional levels, especially CEDAW, CRC & RCDD+5.

United Nations Development Programme declared eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the

third goal is directly concerned with women's empowerment: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels of education by 2015. But we could not achieve gender parity in school education by 2015, though there is improvement in enrolment of girls at all levels in all regions and communities in India. Again we could not achieve the target of reducing infant, child and maternal mortality though decline in these took place. Similarly, women's participation in employment and decision-making is not satisfactory though the champions of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation had boasted generating of massive employment. In reality, there has been a 'jobless growth' for most of the sectors of Indian economy, now manufacturing is improving. According to Tendulkar Committee on poverty line, 29.8 per cent of population (35 crores) lived below poverty line in 2009-10. The situation seems to be more or less same despite relatively a high growth rate of more than 7.5 per cent from 2002 to 2015. Sustainable Development Goals (by 2030) target for bringing down MMR to 70, IMR to 12 and child mortality rate to 25 and universal health coverage to all, inclusive and common education to all, to bring equality among men and women, and to prevent all types of violence against girls and women.

Undoubtedly, educated/working women prefer small family through late marriage, spacing, sterilisation etc. Hence more resources, motivation and consciousness-raising for education and employment of women is the need of the hour by making education up to degree level free, better school/college infrastructure (buildings, toilets, libraries, safe drinking water etc), adequate trained teachers and organised drive for up-skilling, re-skilling, and multi-skilling in all schools and colleges- including reorienting and reorganising Industrial Training Institutes and

Polytechnics for women in trades demanded by the market, state and civil society. A new Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has been created.

Central Government's Schemes for Women:

SABLA (Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls) has been implemented in 205 selected districts of India through ICDS- 100 per cent central assistance for other than nutrition (iron & folic acids, health check up & referral services, counselling on family welfare, child care practices, life skill to 11-18 yrs old girls and vocational training to 16-18 yrs old girls) and 50 per cent central assistance for nutrition. During 2014-15 (up to 31.12.2014), 98.15 lakh beneficiaries were covered for nutrition and 0.42 lakh girls were provided vocational training. One success story relates to Kajal Bhagat in English bazar in Malda district, West Bengal who refused to marry before 18 yrs and leave the school education due to inspiration from Angarwadi worker. Second, Matritva Sahyog yojana was at first implemented in 53 selected districts in India through ICDS. Pregnant women of 19 yrs of age and above for first two live births get Rs. 6000/- in two equal instalments per head during pregnancy and lactation (a central sponsored scheme since 2010-11). It was expanded to 200 additional districts and in 2016-17, it was extended to all districts. During 2015-16, its central share was Rs. 1497 crore as per provisions of National Food Security Act (2013). Third, Swadhar scheme for women in difficult circumstances (deserted widows, released women prisoners, homeless women surviving from national disasters, trafficked women rescued/runaway from brothels, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence without support/means, mentally challenged women without support, and women with AIDS/

HIV without support/deserted) was launched by central government in 2001-2 for shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalised girls/women, to provide emotional support for their rehabilitation, to arrange clinical & legal support, and to provide helpline to women in distress. Now, 311 Swadhar homes are functioning under the aegis of State government's Women Development Corporations or trusts etc. During 2013-14 against the budgetary provision of 75 crores for Swadhar, total expenditure was Rs. 53.74 crore & during 2014-15, its budget was 115 crore. Fourth, Ujjwala is a scheme to combat trafficking of women (since 2007), focusing on prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation of trafficked victims. During 2014-15, 289 projects were sanctioned (including 165 protective and rehabilitative homes with outlay of Rs. 16 crore. Fifth, STEP (support to training and employment programme) for women was launched in 1986-87 as a central sector scheme to provide skills to women above 16 yrs of age. During 2013-14, Rs. 7 crores were released to different States. Sixth, by December 31, 2014 there were 915 working women's hostels with 68631 working women residing there. During 2014-15, the budgetary allocation for construction of working women's hostels was Rs. 25 crores. Finally, Six Stree Shakti Puraskars are given at national level to individuals/organizations with a prize of Rs. 3 lakh each, one Rajya Mahila Samman (Rs. 40,000/-) for each State and UT, and one Zila Mahila Samman (Rs. 20,000/-) for each district. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (save daughter, educate daughter) is a flagship Scheme of the central government.

Recommendations:

Van Staveren rightly suggests six entitlements to women related to reproductive freedom:

- a) Access to contraceptives;

- b) Access to decision-making regarding children (with whom, if when and how many);
- c) Access to sex education and information on sexuality;
- d) Access to (reproductive) health care for parents and children;
- e) Access to alternative roles, other than motherhood / fatherhood;
- f) Access to economic resources.

However, these days publicity of family welfare measures is not prominent as earlier, hence to be highlighted.

Second, both Union and State governments should certainly ensure 30 per cent funding for women at the grassroots. Emphasis on jobs in organised sector should be given priority by all government agencies and private sector should be more open to recruit women for ensuring genuine gender justice as corporate social responsibility. Self-help groups have not succeeded due to non-cooperation of banks for financing.

Third issue of women's representation in decision-making legislative bodies has not been realised so far though reservation for women bill in both Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was passed in 2010 by Rajya Sabha but not passed by Lok Sabha as yet. *Maharashtra, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, M.P., and Rajasthan provide 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayati raj, other States provide 1/3rd reservation.*

Fourth, thousands of widows in Vrindavan (U.P.) alone are living a neglected and inhuman life (begging for food, clothes and shelter, grabbing of Ashram lands by mafia builders resulting into shelterlessness, no old age/widow pension to all, sexual exploitation, having no voting identity cards, no ration cards and finally no adequate facility for last rites after death). Similarly, the condition of thirty lakhs of prostitutes is worse in red

Table 2 : Type of Approach in Different Plans in India

Approaches	Processed	Plans
1.Welfare Approach	Stipends to girls for education, especially homescience, sewing, embroidery	1 st to 5 th plans (1951-1979)
2.Women in Development	Removal of poverty, education & health	6 th & 7 th plans (1980-1990)
3.Women's Empowerment	To address women's felt needs, gender perspective in development process	8 th plan (1992-97)
4.Women as agents of change	To help poor women through self-help groups- women's component plan	9 th plan (1997-2002)
5.Human Development	monitorable targets for reduction in gender gaps in literacy, wage rates & maternal mortality rate	10 th & 11 th plans (2002-2012)
6.Gender Equity	Inclusiveness of all categories of vulnerable women	12 th plan (2012-17)

light areas all over the country. They need to be rehabilitated with alternative modes of livelihood on priority basis.

Fifth, the situation of women farmers and agricultural labourers has also worsened mainly due to natural calamities like floods and drought, unequal terms of trade between agricultural produces/artisans' services and industrial products, high rate of inflation (largely due to black marketing by stockists, middlemen traders), low and unequal wages, poor health and sanitation etc. There were 6000 maternal deaths in 2013-14 in Bihar, but only 352 were reported by district officials, as admitted by State Health Society of Bihar (Times of India, 31.08.2014). As anecdote goes, about 300 years ago, Mumtaj Mahal, queen of Mughal emperor Shahjahan, died of child birth and he built Taj Mahal at Agra in her memory while almost at the same time, a Swedish queen had delivery complications and the king called French doctors to save her and later set up nursing schools to train rural women to attend delivery cases. At present, Sweden has the lowest MMR (8) and IMR (5) whereas India has very high IMR (38 in 2014, while in Bangladesh 31 and in Nepal 29) and MMR 167 (in 2013). During 1990-2012, IMR declined in India by 50 per cent while it declined by

67 per cent in Bangladesh and by 66 per cent in Nepal, because India spends only 1.3 per cent of GDP on health while Britain spends 7.6 per cent and US spends 8.1 per cent of GDP on health. Per head expenditure on health is also unsatisfactory: \$ 61 in India, \$ 102 in Sri Lanka, \$ 3598 in Britain and \$ 9146 in US. Health insurance in India is only 18 per cent. Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana are good beginning in this regard. Similarly, Mission Indradhanush with seven vaccinations for children is also a step in the right direction. Swachh Bharat is equally appreciable as spending one dollar on sanitation saves 9 dollars on health, education and economic development. In India, out of 640 districts, only 193 have medical colleges and hospitals (for tertiary health). In India 70-80, per cent of medical facilities are provided by the private sector. Hence, the public sector expenditure should be increased to 2.5 - 3 per cent of GDP.

We find different approach in focus in different plans (Table2 below):

Finally, only 16 States set up 212 fast track courts in the entire country for trial of crime cases against women and surprisingly even U.P., Bihar and Gujarat did not set

up such courts in time. Union Law and Justice Ministry allocated funds up to a maximum of Rs. 80 crores annually on a matching basis from States. Earlier in 2011 when Union govt ran fast track courts fully, there were 500 such courts in India. Therefore, there is a need for 80 per cent funding from Govt. of India for smooth functioning of such courts so that conviction rate for rape may substantially increase from merely 22 per cent in 2013. U. P. govt. took a decision in August 2014 to open one fast track court in every district. In 2012 in India, there were 8233 dowry deaths and during 2001-2012, there were 91202 dowry deaths in total but the conviction rate in dowry deaths is just 15 per cent because the law enforcement machinery and courts are not sincere. But there are many false cases of dowry also.

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