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## A multidimensional beacon towards women empowerment;

### A retrospect

#### Abstract

*The Oxford Dictionary of English defines empowerment as “to give the authority or power to do something to make someone stronger and more confident, particularly in controlling their life and claiming their rights. Empowerment’ broadly refers to women’s ability to make choices for her and her family. Control over resources and matters of life are often stressed in definitions, as are the dynamics and processes of decision-making. If we try to look at the history, empowerment can be traced in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. After that era various feminists developed the theories on it and the concept got versatile. This paper tries to offer a qualitative measure for empowerment and tries to recognize it through a retrospect. Since 1911, 8<sup>th</sup> march has been declared as International Women’s Day but to celebrate it in true terms is to get women empowered to achieve the dream of the nation. The paper hinges the secondary data through various sources and a complete desk review has been done to understand that how various dimensions impinge on the concept called as empowerment.*

**Key words: Empowerment, Authority, Resources, Dynamics, Feminist**

#### ➤ Introduction

Since the "UN Declaration of the Decade of Women" in 1975, awareness and act on women's concerns have steadily augmented. The nature of empowerment renders it difficult to define. On the one hand, it is often referred to as an objective for many development programmes and projects. On the other hand, it can also be conceived as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes. (Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo, 1993) .The definitions of empowerment were given by various scholars. Peter and Richard in their book named 'To empower' (1977) proposed empowerment as a way of convallescening the welfare services by means of mediating the social institutions. Empowerment also connotes authority. The power of choice and action by women is crucial for the overall development of society. (Ratna Ghosh, Paromita Chakravarti, Kumari Mansi, 2014) Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family as well as household and in turn growth of a nation. The empowerment of women leads to benefit to society which is necessary for the development of country. (Pandya, 2008). Women Empowerment is a process which helps women to change other women’s consciousness through creating awareness. Generation awareness can be done through the process of empowerment. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status

of women in that society. (Shay, 1998). Kabeer defines the concept empowerment as the expansion of women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. (Naila, 2001).

According to Census-2011, India has reached the population of 1210 million, as against 301 million in 1951, of which 58, 64, 69,174 (48.5 %) were females. Nearly half of the country's population consists of women. To boost the status of women the government of India has proposed 'The National Mission for Empowerment of Women' (NMEW) was launched on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round Development of Women. (India, 2015). It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the Government for Women under aegis of various Central Ministries. To empower women the government has also proposed various schemes to assist women. Such schemes provide a support to women who are in need of the assistance so that they can be independent in their life.

Women's work in every sector is essential, whether it is primary, secondary or tertiary. If we talk about the agriculture sector, women are responsible for 60–80% of food manufacture in developing countries, even though they are constrained to growing food crops and rearing poultry and small livestock, and their work remains mostly voluntary. (Annika Törnqvist, Sida Gender Equality Team, Catharina Schmitz, 2009) The edge of the hard work is provided by women.

The policy intervention for women in the every sector needs to be refined and they should also focus towards inequality. Generally it is seen that men get regular wages as compared to women. The need is to develop programmes for every dimension of empowerment then the goal of empowerment and equality can be achieved more rapidly. The Government policies that were directed towards women were focussed on achieving the goal of women's literacy, but political and economic empowerment was not addressed that time. In 1958, a National Committee on Women's Education was appointed by the government to make recommendations that would reduce the gender gap in literacy. (Ratna Ghosh, Paromita Chakravarti, Kumari Mansi, 2014) The word empowerment can't stand alone, the essential elements like Economic empowerment, Political empowerment, Social empowerment etc will accompany. Empowerment is a dynamic process. Separating the process into components may be useful in identifying policy interventions to support empowerment. So, to understand all the dimensions keeping empowerment at the centre is indispensable.

### ➤ **Dimensions of Empowerment**

The table below is showing the various dimensions which are necessary when we talk about empowerment. As empowerment cannot occur in vacuum, hence all the magnitudes are important to consider.

### **Frequently used dimensions of the empowerment which contribute to Household and Community**

Dimensions	Household	Community
Economic	Women's control over her own income and the resources. Contribution to family and the decision making power.	Women's representations in the government and non government sector. The judgements in the budgetary decisions.
Political	Understanding and the acquaintance of the political systems in the country and exercising voting power.	Representations of women in the political systems at various authorities and also in the interest groups. Advocacy for the judicial system.
Social	Freedom of movement and outings in the social arena. Decision making power about the norms of the society.	Contributions of women to the society, the affirmative action and work done by them. Respect towards women through positive representation.
Psychological	Self efficacy and motivation and the psychological wellbeing.	The upbringing of the poor and needy women. A sense of entitlement and inspiration towards women.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified following three key areas of gender inequality in order to focus on gender empowerment measure (GEM) These key areas include:

- Political participation and decision making power as measured by the percentage share of seats in parliament held by women.
- Economic participation and decision making power as measured by the percentage of positions such as legislators, senior officials, managers, technocrats and other professionals held by women and
- Power over economic resources as measured by relative share in estimated earned income held by women and men.

#### ➤ Schemes towards Empowerment

The following schemes at present are aiming at women empowerment and gender equality in India:

- **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG):** The scheme is basically focuses towards the adolescent girls. There empowerment and development.
- **Swadhar** is a scheme which supports women in the difficult circumstances and provides them financial assistance to gain the employment.

- **Ujjawala (2007):** a scheme launched for prevention of trafficking and rescues rehabilitation of women.
- **Short Stay Home for Women and Girls (SSH, 1969)** Short Stay Home for women and girls was introduced as a social defence mechanism, by the Department of Social Welfare in. The scheme is supposed to provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to family discord, crime, violence, mental stress, social ostracism or are being forced into prostitution.
- **STEP (Support to Training and Employment Program for Women)** in 1986-87 with the aim of upgrading skills of women for self and wage employment the government of India launched this scheme. The target group includes the marginalized rural women and urban poor. Special focus is on identified focal districts in which women are predominantly disadvantaged.
- **Kishori Shakti Yogana** :This schemes aims to improve the nutritional, health and development status of adolescent girls, promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition and family care, link them to opportunities for learning life skills, going back to school, help them gain a better understanding of their communal environment and take initiatives to become productive members of the society.

In spite of the various schemes and effective implementation of the programmes, there are certain gaps which need to be fulfilled. The ranking of the country is falling at the 130<sup>th</sup> level. Actually it should be ahead of it. Especially in the rural areas of the country there is extreme lack of awareness which leads to lack of education among the women. To provide greater productive resources women needs to be empowered. When a woman has greater productive resources and agency, she transforms her prospects in all areas of her life including employment, education, health, housing, social and political participation, and physical security. Empowered women are better able to break out of the cycle of poverty and exercise a greater voice in political, economic and cultural sphere. (CESO perspectives, 2010)

#### ➤ **Challenges towards empowerment**

One of the major hitches in measuring empowerment is the behaviours and attributes which signify empowerment in one perspective often have different meanings elsewhere. To determine the empowerment every concept regarding the family, household, marriage, community needs to be measured. A conceptual framework and the flexibility are needed to measure empowerment. The indicators and dimensions of the empowerment should be context specific. It should be also clear that the community conditions must be idiosyncratic rather than universal, so that a more qualitative result can be produced. Qualitative studies of empowerment make an exertion at capturing the process through in depth interviews and case studies which also follows the life changes for specific women through retrospective narratives. (Sen, 1993) The social evils in the society like dowry and early marriages do not allow women to step out of the house. The patriarchal system encourages a male child and considers women as a property or liability from the day she is born. Female feticide and infanticide leads to biggest social crises in the country. If we talk about the safety of women, Indian society is not also safe. Every day various issues from molestation to rape can be seen. Only to reserve seats for women in parliament or Panchayat is not enough, proper implementation of the programmes, especially at the ground level is also necessary.

#### ➤ **Measures and safeguards made for women**

The government has tried to make the numerous laws for the protection of women. Safeguarding women interest is necessary for the development of the nation.

- The Special Marriage Act, 1954- this Act fixed the age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females and provided right to women for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage.
- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955-prohibits child marriage, polygamy, polyandry & provides equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.
- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956- provides right to parental property.
- The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 –according to this Act childless woman can adopt a child and claim maintenance from her husband if she is divorced by him.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961-prevents giving and taking dowry and women exploitation.
- The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, 1956.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.
- The Family Court Act, 1984.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

➤ **Agendas for women empowerment**

The very first thing which the government should consider is to change the mindset of the people regarding women. Only implementation of the policies and legislation will not bring the solution to the problems. Women empowerment focuses on the power and the freedom. The importance should be given to women choices. The participation level of women at every level should be encouraged so that there will be gradual change in the society. The economic independence should be given to women in the every family which will also give them opportunity to develop their personal ambition in life. A woman plays a very significant role in the family. Her role should be determined. It may vary according to the urban/rural orientation which needs more attention and concern. Education also plays an important role in awareness generation and also in knowing the issues of health, employment in broader terms. It should also include the political empowerment that would promise women equality in basic human and legal rights, control of resources, land etc, and an equal opportunity in employment and earning. Swami Vivekananda had said **“That nation which doesn’t respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future”**

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