

Concept and Types of Women Empowerment

Keshab Chandra Mandal

*A Formerly Scholar of Vidyasagar University, Department of Political Science with Rural Administration, Midnapore, West Bengal, India
E-mail: keshab_2006@sify.com*

[Abstract] Global empowerment of women is a new concept. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the issue of women's empowerment has gained importance among scholars of universities, and in national and international platforms. But the concept was not deeply ingrained into the governments' policies and programs until the declaration of the 'Women's Decade' in 1975. Though the Indian Government endowed franchise to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and color immediately after Independence, it was confined mainly in papers while the majority of women were essentially powerless until the last decade of previous century. Considering their low socio-economic position, scholars, bureaucrats, and governments have begun to pay considerable attention in empowering women. Because of India's feudal society, the pace of advancement of women remains tardy. This article addresses the challenges and realities of this situation. It calls for government, political decision makers, NGOs, and other actors to come forward to ensure women's all round development for making India a developed country.

[Keywords] women empowerment; women's decade; India

Introduction

History demonstrates that out of all deprived groups in the world women have suffered the most. Their suffering knew no bounds based on culture, race, region or religion. They have been victims of abuse, molestation, violence, rape, poverty, malnutrition, ill treatment – in a word all sorts of deprivation. But until recently, scholarly attention was not focused enough on subjects related to empowerment of women. In the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious Indian sub-continent, women face one or other kinds of problem here and there. Only the dimension differs from state to state, society to society, and place to place. Even in the 21st century women are beaten, considered witches; they are getting stoned for committing sexual activities; honor killing is in practice in many parts of India; and with petty excuses they are tortured and raped while the main perpetrators move freely without any punishment. Further, they are disallowed to use mobile phones; debarred to choose their own dress or profession; have little freedom in marriage and reproductive matters; are restrained to move freely within their locality; are discouraged to participate in political activities; and many women remain starved or half fed. In a word, they are bound in chains of societal taboos and face lots of peculiar difficulties throughout their life.

It is a fact that women have been suffering in every age and country from their protectors i.e., fathers, brothers, uncles, neighbors and others in childhood; boyfriends and lovers in youth; husbands and in-laws in married life; while from sons and others in old age. Man has inflicted an unspeakable injury upon woman by subjugating her in different phases in their lives and through the ages. Thus "This question of woman's rights was a world question, and as old as the human race. In all ages, woman has regarded by man as inferior, and had robbed of the rights, with which God had endowed her, in common with every human being" (Langley & Fox, 1994, pp.100-101).

Women are the victims of social, political, religious, and economic subordination and deprivation in Indian society. Also they are treated unequally and cannot participate in democratic activities equally with men. Democracy becomes meaningless and paralyzed unless fifty per cent of its population participates in the democratic decision making processes and joins in the economic, social, and political activities. Therefore, to make democracy sustainable it is necessary that both women and men should take part in the development activities. Without the active participation of fifty per cent population i.e., women, the development of India is sure to be partial. It can be said that, "Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is" (Verba & Nie,

1972, p. 1). Thus the issue of women's empowerment through participation in various developmental activities has become sine qua non.

Origin of the Term Empowerment

It is interesting to note that most of the dictionaries only shows a pre-twentieth century definition of the verb empower meaning 'to empower', and 'to give power to'. The word was first used in the 17th century and has meanings like 'authorize', 'delegate', or 'enable'. The term empowerment, as a result, is a complicated idea. However, it implies the transfer of power in a dynamic way over a period of time. Empowerment seems to be a modern idea that would not have been possible 200 years ago when the idea of democracy and 'government of the people, for the people, by the people' was something to fight and die for. In the 20th century we saw many examples of political empowerment in different countries in the world led by people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. From the perspective of the members of low-powered group, empowerment refers to efforts to expand their base of power.

The issue of 'women empowerment' is now a global phenomenon. Since the origin of the United Nations Organization, the issue of women's development has attracted the attention from the scholars worldwide, and the concept has come in the political agenda of a large number of countries. At present, the term "empowerment" has replaced the erstwhile term "development". Though the term 'empowerment' had become a 'buzzword' in the sixties, it was not discussed so extensively in literature until the eighties. It took about twenty five years for the United Nations to proclaim the year 2001 as the 'International Year for Women's Empowerment' after declaring the 'Women's Decade' in 1975. India also declared the year 2001 as the 'Women's Empowerment Year'.

Definition of the Term Empowerment

In almost every society and in every sphere of life women assume unequal position and status; thus it is necessary to empower them by providing equal opportunities. The term empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process and it helps people gain control over their own lives. Further, it can be called as a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they think as important. "Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities...."

(Retrieved from <http://www.empowermentillustrated.com>).

Empowerment of women is not only imperative but also crucial for all-round development of society and the nation as a whole. The issue of 'women empowerment' has become a central point in the programs and activities of the United Nations and other Government and Non-Government Organizations. Subsequently, it has also become a major concern of the social scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and researchers. But there is a lack of unanimity among the scholars in comprehending the term empowerment. Various scholars have tried to define the term from their own perspectives. The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always encompasses a wide variety of definitions. These terms include self-strength, self-control, self-power, self-reliance, personal choice, capability of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making power, freedom etc. These definitions are embedded in local value systems and beliefs. Empowerment has both intrinsic as well as instrumental value. "The most common use of the term "empowerment" refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that it more nearly equals the power of the high power group" (Bhadra, 2001, p. 61).

According to Sushama Sahay (1998), "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life". It implies decentralization of power and authority in the deprived, oppressed and powerless people who have not been able to participate in decision making and implementation of policies and programs of both government organizations as well as in societal matters. Empowerment of women is not only essential but also imperative for all round development of a country. The term empowerment has been defined by

Arundhati Chattopadhyaya (2005). She holds that, "Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres (social, economic, and political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions". Further the term empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining control over one's own life while supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives" (Aspy & Sandhu, 1999, p. 24). Goodrich describes empowerment as "a benevolent but unilateral transaction in which one person enhances another's ability to feel competent and take action, that is, enhances another's power-to" (Patricia, Darlington & Mulvaney, 2003, p. 12).

The World Bank also defines the term empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets" (Chattopadhyay, 2005, p. 27).

Types of Empowerment

It is evident from the above discussions that different authors and organizations have tried to define the term 'empowerment' from their own perspectives. It ranges from self-strength to efficiency building of women. However, empowerment of women now can be categorized into five main parts – social, educational, economic, political and psychological.

Social Empowerment

Social Empowerment refers to the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures. Social empowerment addresses the social discriminations existing in the society based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism. Broadly put, the term empowerment is defined as "a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important" (Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/comm1.php>). A nearly similar definition has been given by Valsamma Antony (The Kurukshetra, February 2006, p. 27). She considers that, "Empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable the individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life." Empowerment of women means enjoyment of equal rights, equal status and freedom of self-development with men. Valsamma Antony quoted Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the USSR, in one of her articles. Gorbachev opined that, "The status of women is a barometer of the democratism of any state, an indicator of how human rights are respected in it" (ibid).

From a sociological point of view, K.D. Gangrade (2001) has extended a definition of empowerment. He considers women's empowerment as "... equal status to women opportunity and freedom to develop herself." Women are exploited in almost every society. Srivastava (2001) observes women's empowerment from the perspective of their vulnerability to various kinds of exploitations. He envisages that it is necessary to "empowering women socially, economically and politically so that they can break away from male domination and claim equality with them."

Health is another important factor for achieving total development of human beings. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) a positive health status is defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"(The Kurukshetra, October 2002, p. 22.). Mira Shiva (2001) feels, "Women's empowerment means that women no matter where they are healthy, have enough for their needs, their own survival and that of their family and community, to be able to live with dignity, live and work in safe and caring environment, which allows their growth and holistic development i.e., physically, emotionally, socially, economically." Legal experts and lawyers have viewed and analyzed women's empowerment from their own perspectives. The preamble to the Charter of the United Nations emphasizes upon the member states "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal

rights of men and women” (Levin, Leah, 2002, p. VI). Sujata Manohar (2001) defines women’s empowerment in this respect. She envisages that, “The key to women’s empowerment is recognition and enforcement of women’s human rights.” In the light of ‘equality before the law’ and ‘equal protection of the law,’ the legal experts want to bring down all kinds of legal discrimination against women. Without the establishment of women’s legal rights and human social order women’s real empowerment will be a distant dream.

Empowerment of women has been defined by Griffin (1987). She has aptly pointed out that, “being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home. Power also means having women’s contribution recognized and valued.” On the other hand, McWhirter (1994) was quoted by Aspy and Sandhu in their book - *Empowering Women Equity: A Counseling Approach*. They delineate that, “Empowerment is the process by which people, organization, or groups who are powerless or marginalized (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without infringing on the rights of others and (e) which coincides with actively supporting the empowerment of others in their community.”

Educational Empowerment

“Traditional concepts recognize higher education as an instrument of personal development. It helps in growing an individual’s intellectual horizons, wellbeing and potential for empowerment” (The Kurukshetra, September 2012, p. 25). It is considered as the single most important instrument of socio-political and economic transformation. But the picture of women’s educational empowerment is not rosy in India. “The recently released United Nations Development Report 2011 ranked India 134 out of 187 countries” (The Kurukshetra, September 2012, p. 32). Without proper education to all children including girls, gender empowerment is not possible. This maxim - if one male child is literate personally he alone becomes educated but if one girl child is educated the whole family becomes benefited - has been realized by the national political leaders, policy makers, administrators and bureaucrats. In this regard P.H. Sethumadhava Rao (2001) considers that, “The most important thing is that they (the women) need to be given free and compulsory education so as to make them aware of the rights and duties and possible free legal aid so that they can fight their cases without spending money.” An educated mother is a one thousand fold superior to a mere lecturer. Education creates self-confidence, self-esteem, self-sufficiency to a person. It brings light of hope; increases social, political, intellectual, cultural and religious consciousness; broadens the length of mind; removes all kinds of bigotry, narrowness, superstition and enhances fellow-feeling, tolerance etc.

Kiran Devendra (2001) stresses the importance of health, education and self-esteem of women. Devendra feels, “Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in developmental activities.” Devendra believes that empowered women will be able to participate in decision-making, policy formulation and implementation of different policies and programs. Education plays a great role in this sphere. Pathak (2003) argues in line with Devendra. He emphasizes that, “Women have to be empowered socially, educationally, politically, economically and culturally.” He further states that, “When literacy percentage is increased, the women could be able to understand their actual rights which have been already given to them by the constitution of India and accordingly the provisions contained in Panchayati Raj itself.”

Information Technology and media (both electronic and print) are assuming pivotal roles in dissemination of knowledge to the people and bringing the world nearer to one’s reach. In the present day situation it is not possible for any society to think about empowerment without the incorporation and utilization of IT. The outstanding feature of empowerment lies in its very term ‘power.’ Shaikh N. Meera and D.M.U. Rao (The Yojana, February 2003, Vol. 47, p. 29) consider that, “The empowerment process is one where women find time and space of their own, and begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively.” Further Shaikh and Rao (ibid) hold that, “Women’s empowerment is a state of being that

reflects a certain level of critical consciousness about external realities and an awareness about their internal thought construction and belief systems that affect their well being in terms of gender justice and social justice; as well as the determination to use their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to protect their lives and sustain values that guarantee gender equality and personal, social, economic, political and institutional level.” Professor Ishita Mukhopadhyaya (2003) discusses the term ‘empowerment’ in a broader perspective. In her opinion, the person who has no power has to be empowered. According to her opinion, “Empowerment means freedom from deprivation; empowerment means equal access to knowledge and information; knowledge of being within groups of their own; empowerment also means organization; it means creation of information system and knowledge base.”

Poverty and illiteracy are intertwined with one another. Poor people are mostly uneducated or lowly educated. This mass of uneducated people feels one kind of powerlessness. They feel some invisible forces from outside are controlling their lives. This powerless and inferior attitude creates a sense of intimidation. They began to depend on fortune, luck, destiny and above all God or supernatural elements. With attainment of education and knowledge women can overcome these problems. In this regard Renana Jhabvala (2001) feels that, “Empowerment is the process by which the disempowered or powerless people can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their lives.” It is a process by which the disempowered can change the equation of power, their living conditions and their existing unequal conditions.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is the crying need of this hour. “Wage employment means economic power” (Elliott, 2008, p. 86). Through employment women earn money and it enables women and girls to become ‘bread earners’, contributing members of households with a strong sense of their own economic independence. “Economic empowerment is a powerful tool against poverty” (Biswas, 2010, p. 27). The Djakarta Declaration (1994) critically examines that, “empowerment of women is not only equal consideration; it was a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development.” Without economic self-sufficiency other rights and scopes remain meaningless to the people. Economic empowerment can be described as a means by which the poor, landless, deprived and oppressed people of all societies can be freed from all kinds of deprivation and oppression; can directly enjoy the benefits from markets as well as household; can easily manage a square nutritious food and fulfill basic requirements such as house, cloth, medicine and pure water etc. SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) has emphasized on the economic empowerment of women. It holds that raising voice and visibility is not possible unless there is an access “to the ownership of economic resources by the poor women.” Promilla Kapur (2001) observes that, “women’s empowerment could be described as a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and access to money – and control over decision making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain power.” Economic empowerment gains through equal work opportunities, equal organizational benefits, equal treatments and equal working environment.

Self Employed Women’s Association (SWEA) argues for women’s empowerment through the attainment of full employment and self-reliance of poor and rural exploited women. It holds that, “When there is a woman’s income, there is security of work; she has assets in her name, she feels economically strong, independent and autonomous” (The Kurukshetra, January 2005, Vol.53, No. 3, p. 39). Archana Singh (The Kurukshetra, April 2004, p. 33), through the article ‘Micro Finance For Women’s Empowerment’ also argues that, “Micro Finance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy.” The term ‘empowerment’ has also been defined by Singh (ibid). She envisages that, “Empowerment is a process of change by which individuals or groups gain power and ability to take control over their lives.” In economic development, the empowerment approach focuses on mobilizing the self-help efforts of the poor, rather than providing them with social welfare. “Economic empowerment is also the empowering of previously disadvantaged sections of the population...” (Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empowerment>).

Political Empowerment

Participation of women in the political field and in various decision-making bodies is an important tool for empowerment. The participation of women at all levels of governance structures is the highest need of this hour for women's actual empowerment. Alida Brill (2000) holds that, "Without our own voices being heard inside the government areas and halls of public policy and debate, we are without the right to accountability – a basic establishment of those who are governed." In other words, "Empowerment is not giving people power; people already have plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificently. We define empowerment as letting this power out" (Blanchard, Carlos, & Randolph, 1996). It encourages people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life or work environment and ultimately, help them develop within themselves or in the society.

Women throughout the world have been struggling to break away the shackle of bondage, subjugation, oppression and all kinds of ill treatment both within and outside of their families. Without bringing them in the corridor of power where they can formulate policies and programs and implement them, the survival of women is very difficult. Pam Rajput (2001) also supports the view. According to Rajput, "Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular the political sphere is crucial for their advancement and the foundation of a gender equal society. It is central to the achievement of the goals of equality, development and peace." Without political participation it would be very difficult for women to increase effectiveness, capacity, challenging the existing power structure and patriarchal ideology.

Politics decide who will get what and how much. Hence, empowering women politically is the highest need of the hour. Women's political empowerment implies the decentralization of power and authority in the deprived, oppressed and powerless people who have not been able to participate in the decision making processes and implementation of policies and programs of both government organizations as well as familial and societal matters. Tiwari (2001) examines the issue of women's empowerment in the context of Indian society and feminist women's liberation approach in the present day environment. He has suggested a few measures for women's empowerment which "...primarily focus attention on rejecting all restrictions, controls, limitations, values etc., on the ground that these are imposed on women only by patriarchy and are the revelation of male dominance..." But Kumud Sharma (1991-92) has rightly pointed out that "the term empowerment refers to range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations." The Country Report of Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) envisages that, "empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would promote women's inherent strength and positive self-image."

Bidyut Mohanty (1999) feels that the enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitution (Amendment) Acts needs citation are meant for women's empowerment. Mohanty holds that, "the idea was to facilitate women's participation in grassroots politics, thereby empowering them to become partners in the decision-making process." Shakuntala Narasimhan (1999) expresses her opinion in regard to women's political empowerment. She opines that the word empowerment means "... Bringing women into the main-stream of national activity as equal partners alongside men..."

The feminist scholar and activist Srilatha Batliwala (1995) expresses her view of empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power-relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power, may be termed as empowerment." According to Chandra (1997), "Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation or re-distribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male domination." Mahatma Gandhi also spoke in favor of women's empowerment. He declares that, "According to me empowerment may mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself" (Gangrade, 2001, p. 1).

Kamala Bhasin (1998) also broadly defines the term empowerment. Bhasin cites that, "It means recognizing women's contribution, women's knowledge; it means helping women fight their own fears, and feeling of inadequacy and inferiority; it means women enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity; it means women controlling their own bodies; it means women becoming economically independent and self-reliant; it means women controlling resources like land and property; it means reducing women's

burden of work, especially within the home; it means creating and strengthening women's groups and organizations; it means promoting qualities of nurturing, caring, gentleness not just in women but also in men." Women's empowerment is closely related with welfare and their development. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen equates development with freedom, which he thinks, empowers women.

The disempowered people should come forward and take active part in the development process. The backwardness of a particular segment of society i.e., women, is mainly due to their failure to take part in development activities; though the failure is caused mainly by the obstructions put up by the patriarchal society. Also it is equally true that 'no one can empower any one.' Real empowerment is possible only by one's own effort. In this regard Karl says that, "empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to peoplethe process of empowerment is both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups that people most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and to bring about change" (Karl, 2002, p. 6). Prasad (2002) views that, "Empowerment is a process geared towards participation, greater decision making and transformative action through awareness and capacity building". Empowerment can otherwise be cited as a multi-pronged process, which requires pooling of resources to gather power and strength.

Since empowerment of women depends largely on their participation in social and political activities, it is necessary to understand the nature of political participation also. Various scholars have defined the term political participation in different ways. But there is a common thread that connects of them. It is closely related with power and it very much exists in democratic societies. Miller holds that, "It is the activity which aims at bringing government to bear in a particular direction, to secure particular results" (Carolyn, 2008, p. 90). Lasswell assumes that, "Political process is the shaping, sharing and exercise of power" (Niroj, 2000, p. 15).

By joining politics people feel themselves empowered. It is a ladder for upward mobility in society. It is a route to empowerment for the deprived and the powerless. Through political participation, people find opportunities to change and influence public decisions and to bring them in their favor. They can also protect their self-interest and legitimate rights and promote justice for the common men.

Traditionally the concept of politics is related to government structures. But currently the notion of politics is taking a new and different shape. Movements, strikes, protests, demonstrations, struggles, processions etc. have become the legitimate expression of political engagement. Political participation and shouting slogans have grown as the language of influencing and bargaining different decisions and policies of different government and non-government organizations in favor of its participants.

But it should be remembered that empowerment of women would never mean the acquirement and use of power and authority by the women to subjugate and dominate their opposite sex or to one group of women by another. That is not desired at all. Women's empowerment means to distribute equal power and authority between men and women and creating an environment of freedom from domination and suppression. Promilla Kapur (2001) has rightly viewed that, "Woman's empowerment in reality is to empower herself and not overpower men." Vishwanath Ramesh (The Yojana, March 2003, Vol. 47, p. 5) also argues for women's empowerment. He upholds that, "The empowerment of women concerns women gaining control and power over their own lives. It involves awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources." But he strongly opposes the idea of empowering women from outside, because he feels it should come out from within. He further highlights that, "As a general definition, however, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (ibid).

Psychological Empowerment

Through psychological empowerment women not only transgress the traditional and patriarchal taboos and social obligations, they also transform their selves and subjectivities. When women join educational institutions, political parties or decision-making bodies; hold white color jobs, take decisions and travel different places; occupy land and wealth they feel psychologically powered and build their self-

confidence, recognize their self-worth and take control of their own income and body. This joining in any institution and occupation gives them opportunities to see and to know more of the world than those who have stayed behind at home. "This personal growth and exploration has given them self-respect, pride, maturity, and resiliency as they have exerted their independence away from home" (Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/comm1.php>).

This also gives them mental strength, and makes them firm, tough and hardworking. They also learn the art of living and how to adjust with the changed circumstances. Further, it gives them satisfaction in various ways relating to work, living, learning, and adjusting in personal and financial situations.

Methods of Empowerment

In the beginning of the new millennium the term 'empowerment' has gained momentum both nationally and internationally. It is closely related to power and status. There are different methods of empowerment. This can be achieved by means of acquiring assets and properties – economic, social, physical, and intellectual; by attaining education – conventional, vocational, scientific, legal, technical, astrological, and astronomical; by holding white colored jobs as well as increasing entrepreneurial qualities; enhancing personality and exposure of mass-media and by holding various high posts in national, state or local level institutions. Empowerment of women is also possible by acquiring land and applying high-tech instruments for higher production with minimum cost – thus making more profit, by engaging in economic activities i.e., by assuming the role of bread-earners, by achieving mental strength, courage and building confidence among themselves.

Except for the above methods, the most easy, congenial and befitting way of empowerment is participation in the political process. Active and widespread citizen participation is also very much essential for the best functioning of various governmental units – the Center, the States and the Local. Political participation has provided ample scope for bringing about changes in the status of the people and boosting upward mobility of women in both rural as well as urban areas. John Clayton Thomas (1995) argues that, "Public participation is essential to the success of a democracy..." Sidney Verba et. al. (1978) have discussed about various modes of political participation. They feel that there are many ways by which people can be active in attempting to influence various governmental decisions such as: one can write a letter to a representative, vote or join a community action group or so on. They discard the non-systematic activities viz. – protests, riots, assassinations and all kinds of civil violence. The 'ceremonial' or 'support' participation are ignored by them where people take part in expressing support for the government, marching in parades, working hard for the developmental programs and projects, participating in youth groups that are organized by the governmental agencies or exercising franchise in ceremonial elections. Verba and others identify four types of political participation such as: (a) voting, (b) campaign activity, (c) communal activity and (d) particularized contacts.

Voting is the most powerful instrument for controlling the government as well as its members. Secondly, campaign is another regular mode of activity in the electoral process. Like voting, campaign may exert pressure on the political leaders. The result of campaigning is collective in nature. However, campaigning in election process is a more difficult task than mere casting vote. Thirdly, communal activities are two-pronged i.e., individual and co-operative. In this category individual citizens may contact the government official and may collectively try to influence the social issues affecting the society in general and particularly themselves. Fourthly, in particularized contacts the members of a family or a few family members contact a government official on a particular problem which affects him or themselves. It requires a great deal of initiative on the part of a citizen or its family.

Condition for Empowerment

Different factors affect in the process of women's empowerment through participation in politics. These are "the psychological make-up of the person, his total personality and external environment – the social, economic, cultural, individual response to such stimuli..."(Niroj, 2000, p.17). There are some other conditions affecting women's political participation. They are like: age-old belief, custom, superstition,

lack of time, patriarchal obligations and hindrances, lack of confidence, lack of education, consciousness, meager financial position in family and hostile society etc. All these problems pose great threats in the way of women's empowerment. Besides, the political parties, it seems, are not much interested in making women involved in the mainstream of political decision-making bodies.

Why Especially Women Empowerment Became Necessary?

Empowerment of women is not only necessary; it has become an imperative now. Over the last three decades, various women's organizations, N.G.Os, and liberal Governments are actively working towards empowerment of women. The status of women is overall deplorable, oppressive and discriminatory through the length and breadth of Indian states irrespective of the party and gender of political leader in power. Some illustrations of discriminations and nature of violence against women may not be out of place here to comprehend their status in the social, economic and political spheres in different countries including India.

Only five per cent members of the United Nations have ratified the Convention of the International Labor Organization (1981 & 1982) protecting women with family responsibilities against unfair termination of employment. In the United States of America about 77 percent of poverty is borne by single, divorced, or widowed women. Though the Communist ideology constitutionally favors sexual equality, it is found that in Soviet Union nearly 88 percent women are ditch diggers while less than 1 percent of the Soviet Academy of Science is women. In Indonesia the discrimination is more pathetic. A 15 year old boy is considered to be the legal head of the family in his father's absence even if his mother is a lawyer or a teacher in high school (Eschel, 1989, p. ix).

Though women comprise 50 percent of the world's total population, they hold less than 12 percent of the seats in the national legislatures. Out of 177 countries of the world only in 14 countries women hold more than thirty per cent seats in their national parliaments. This includes European and American countries where, too, women fail to enjoy equal political power and equality. As it is found in the Napoleonic Civil Code which states that, "those persons without rights at law are minors, married women, criminals and the mentally deficient" (Eschel, 1989, p. 17).

If we look at the status of women in India, we could see that the socio-economic and political status of women is similarly horrible. As per the 2011 census of India the literacy rate of women is only 65.46 percent whereas this rate for men is 82.14 percent. So there is clear gap of 16.68 percent between men and women, and about 35 percent women in India are illiterate. In rural areas women's education rate is even worse. The census data indicate that the literacy rate of rural Indian women is only 58.75 percent in comparison to men's 78.57 percent. The sex ratio is also deplorable. "One of the striking features of 2011 Census is that the sex ratio has drastically gone down from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011. This shows that Indian people have more preference over boy child than the female child. Female feticide is increasing in an alarming rate in India and this is more so among the states having high literacy" (The Yojana, August 2012, p.71). The Sixth All India Educational Survey of NCERT (1995) found that women formed 23% of primary teachers in rural areas as compared to 60% in urban areas; at the upper primary, the corresponding figures are 25% and 59%. There is also discrimination in recruitment of women as primary teachers. There are lack of women's vocational training institutions in India. "Out of 2240 Industrial Training Institutions (ITIs), Industrial Training Centers (ITCs), there were 154 women ITIs/ ITCs and 129 women wings in General ITIs to specifically cater to vocational training needs of women"(The Yojana, August 2012, p.71.). Women's position in parliament is also discouraging. "The current 15th Lok Sabha has the highest number of Women MPs. Women constitute 11 per cent of the 15th Lok Sabha" (The Yojana, August 2013, p. 18).

Women's estimated earned income (PPP US\$) in 2007 was only \$1,304 but Men's estimated earned income was \$4,102. On the contrary, this rate for the United States' men is \$34,996 and women's earned income is \$5,536 (The World Bank, 2009). Rate of women's death during child birth is also depressible. "Maternal Mortality Rate per 1000 live births in India is 212 (2009)" (The Kurukshetra, August 2012, p. 16). Child marriage is another problem in India. "However, 36.8 percent of girls marry before attaining 18 years of age and the median age of the girls at the first marriage is 17.2 years," though legal age of

marriage for a girl is 18 years. As a result of early marriage, about 16 percent girls within the age group of 15-19 years had begun childbearing. Anemia, especially in adolescent girls, is an equally challenging problem. 36 per cent of women within the age group of 15-49 years had a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18.5 kg/m² and about 47 per cent of the girls in the age group 15-19 years had BMI less than 18.5 kg/m² indicating chronic nutritional deficiency (The Yojana, November 2012, p. 43).

Anemia results in poor health and poor physical growth; it also reduces school performance and diminishes concentration. "Iron Deficiency is the most widespread nutritional deficiency disorder in the country today. Nearly 58 per cent pregnant women, 50 per cent women in reproductive age, 56 per cent adolescent girls, 30 per cent adolescent boys and 70 per cent children under five years of age are anemic" (The Yojana, August 2013, volume 57, inside cover page).

Empowerment and Participation

India is a participatory democracy. In India, people's participation in political activities occupies a central place. The definitions of democracy indicate that there must be people's participation. Without the participation of its citizens, democracy becomes meaningless, and growth remains lop-sided. Thus participation of people and especially women in politics becomes an imperative for making sense of democracy and development. It is now proved that politics ultimately decides the fate of the people. The political leaders after winning in elections hold various posts of political decision making. They become the Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (M.Ps), who in turn formulate laws for all people in the state and country. Through the formulation of laws and regulations they give benefits and allocate values to the people. The MLAs and MPs amend Constitution, open job opportunities, hike salary, give or stop dearness allowance, open or close markets for foreign investors, reserve seats for particular sections in government jobs, or legislative assembly or local governments etc. As most of these members are men, they are less concerned about the lower socio-economic and political position of women. Hence, women's participation in political activities and especially in decision-making bodies is very vital to further enhance women's social, educational, economic and political empowerment.

The process of political participation in rural politics can be divided into two types; (a) direct participation and (b) indirect participation. Direct participation includes standing as candidates in elections, casting votes, attending meetings of different bodies and forum, participation in political campaigning, articulation of political views and opinions among the rural masses, delivering lectures, organizing protests and movements, mobilizing opinion on an issue that affects the society in general and the localities in particular. On the other hand, indirect participation is possible through the participation in other kinds of political activities and decision making not directly but through representatives. Through nominating or electing representatives to certain bodies people take part in the process in an indirect way.

People's participation in a decentralized political system is most vital for its survival. "It is a means to attain greater control and authority over the environment to improve the conditions of living" (Jana, 2004, p. 245). The need for people's participation in decision making and implementation of policies was realized soon after Independence in 1947 and initiatives were taken through the launching of Community Development Program to involve rural masses in development activities. But the program failed to rouse interest and enthusiasm among the people to the extent it was expected. Active participation of those people for whom the benefits of development were intended is an essential condition for the success of any scheme or project. "...but there was no organized attempt to motivate local people for their involvement in planning, implementation and monitoring of the development programs" (The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XXXI (April – June), No. 2, pp. 211-215). Lately it has been understood that without the active and whole-hearted participation of the rural people, who consist nearly 70 percent of the total population, actual development of the country is impossible.

India is a developing country and it visualizes being a developed one by the year 2020. The essential precondition for achieving this goal is the full-fledged utilization of her human resources through active participation in the democratic process. The developmental process of the country is compelled to stagger without the active participation of both the sexes in the decision-making and in the implementation of various plans, programs and schemes of Governments.

Women constitute nearly half of the world's total population and they are the 'largest excluded category in the political sphere. The recently published 'Progress of World Women's Report –2002' by the United Nations Development Fund for women reveals that only seven European countries e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Iceland and Germany have done excellent work for the improvement of gender equality and women empowerment. The position of women in state legislatures is worse in 38 developing countries including India, which records even less than 12 percent (The Chronicle, February 2004, p.78). Therefore, women's participation in the decision-making process is a sine qua non for the development of India.

Empowerment of women through political participation has been discussed by Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie and Jae-On-Kim (1978 & 1980). According to them, "By political participation we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take". Nancy Burns et al. (2001) have maintained that, "By political participation we refer simply to activity that has the interest or effect of influencing government action – either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies". It implies that people take part in political activities to influence the policies and decisions of the government and try to bring about a suitable change, when necessary. Paul (The Kurukshetra, May 2002, p.5) has linked political participation with development project. According to him, "Participation is an active process by which beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhance their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish".

In all liberal democratic systems it is desired that people - both male and female – should take part in politics in equal proportion. The broader view of political participation put forward by Jayasri Ghosh (2000) is as follows: "Political participation refers to those activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy. These activities typically include voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially to party fund and communicating with respective representatives. The more 'active' forms of participation include formal enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering voters, speech writing and speech making, working in campaign and competing for a public or party office".

Participation in development process means the active and full involvement of the people in development and advancement of society which affect their interests, lives, irrespective of class, race, gender, age and ability. Now-a-days nobody can remain aloof from politics. There are some who remain indifferent, do not involve themselves directly in political activities. But somehow they are affected by the policies and decisions made by the different government agencies. Milbrath (2000) holds that, "Every person participates at least passively in political system in which he lives...There is no such thing as not behaving". Political participation by the citizens is desired in democracy for removing all kinds of socio-political and economic discrimination existing in the society and ameliorating the status and position of weak, and backward people including women.

Conclusion

It is now well-known fact that the issue of women's empowerment for the positive change and transformation of the existing unequal society is more crucial and more important. So far women's role as mothers, homemakers, wives and sisters are well known, but their role in shifting the entire power relations of a country is a modern concept. It was John Stuart Mill, a British Member of Parliament, whose essay *The Subjugation of Women*, probably written with his wife Harriet Taylor Mill, was the first attempt in favor of establishing equality between the males and the females. Further, with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in the eighteenth century, the struggle for women's equality started to brew. But after the second half of the nineteenth century with the formation of world Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU- 1874, USA) and German Social Democratic Party (GSDP, Germany), under the leadership of Francis Williard and Clara Zetkin respectively, the fight for the women's causes including voting rights began to take a concrete shape.

After more than two centuries since the beginning of struggle for women's empowerment and equality, still the majority of women are backward and little progress has taken place in their overall status and position in society. It is not true that the western women enjoy far better status and equality in society, politics, education and economy than oriental women; rather it is a fact that the problems and sufferings of women are almost the same both in developed and underdeveloped countries - from Africa to Europe and from Asia to America. Women are still a minority in the society though they constitute fifty percent of the total population. These strong fifty per cent population need to be provided with equal opportunities in economic, social, political, educational, religious and legal spheres. It must be kept in mind that, "Gender equity is the realization of complete equality in all aspects of the social order regardless of gender" (Aspy & Sandhu, 1999, p. 9). For achieving complete equality in the society between two genders, it is necessary to eliminate all kinds of domination, oppression and discrimination against the fair sex by their male counterpart. It is hoped that India will prosper and achieve its Vision – 2020 with hand to hand co-operation and active participation of both men and women in all spheres of developmental activities.

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