

Programme:-Master in Sociology

Semester II

Postgraduate Department of Sociology

Patna University

Course:- CC-7(GENDER AND SOCIETY)

Unit V:- Women Empowerment

Learning Objectives:-

- To know the purpose of women empowerment.
- To understand the characteristics of women empowerment.
- To explain the need and importance of women empowerment.

Purpose of Empowerment :-

According to R. India and Deepak Kumar Behra (1999) women must be considered as the agent of development rather than targets of development agencies and planners. Women must define their own needs and goals as well as strategies. A prerequisite for women's participation in development process is their empowerment.

The international conference of population and development held in Cairo (1994) established a new consensus on two fundamental points:-

- 1] Empowerment of women and improving their status are essential to realize the full potential of economic, political and social development.
- 2] Empowerment of women is an important end itself.

According to India Kurukshetra (1999) the conference declared that empowerment of women through education was stressed upon for elimination of violence and atrocities against women in home, at home place and public and private institutions. This discrimination results in their further marginalization as members of the society. Women must exercise full participation in decision making process in all walks

of life and fully participate with men in finding equitable and practical solutions to issues both in the family and society. It also declared that human rights of women and girls child are inalienable, integral and invisible parts of universal human rights.

In her measure to mark the first day of the 'Year of Empowerment of Women', the National Commission for Women Chairperson Vibha Parthasarathi said, "the year to come must see women in apex decision making bodies, enter profession denied to them so far, recognize their contribution on important and legitimate and help them to fight against disease and deprivation, indignity and inequality."

Characteristics of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment processes certain characteristics, they are the following :-

1. Women empowerment is giving power to women; it is making women better off.
2. Women empowerment enables a greater degree of self-confidence and sense of independence among women.
3. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.
4. Women empowerment gives the capacity or power to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society.
5. Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves to increase their self-reliance.
6. Women empowerment provides greater economy to women.
7. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
8. Women empowerment challenges traditional power equations and relations.
9. Women empowerment abolishes all gender based discrimination in all institutions and structure of society.
10. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.
11. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive power of existing gender and social relations.
12. Empowerment of women makes them more powerful to face the challenges of life, to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities.

13. Empowerment of women enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life.
14. Empowerment also means equal status to women.
15. Empowerment also means providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom belief and practice.
16. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familiar and economic spheres and various levels such as individual, group and community.
17. Empowerment of women is an on going dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate.
18. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

Need and Importance of Women Empowerment

Gender equality and empowerment of women is recognized globally as a key element to achieve progress in all area. The charter of United Nations signed in 1943 is the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality as a fundamental right. Ever since there had been many convections, programmes and goals to help women conferring on them human rights which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. In order to promote development of women and to protect their rights, the General Assembly of U.N. adopted, "Convection on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women" on 18th December 1979, which came into force on 3rd September 1981.

The convection also took notice of particular problems faced by rural women and their significant role in survival of their families. So all states to the convection agreed to take appropriate measures to enable rural women to participate and benefit from rural development. In spite of many convections and time bound measurable goals, world statistics speak of deplorable state of women that is a cause of concern.

In term of every indices of development and socio-economic, women have faced worse than men, in all regions and in all strata of the population. Hence the need and importance of women empowerment can be looked up on in the following direction:-

(a) As women :-

Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor population or almost 900 million of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate population of 876 million people are women. They produce 50 percent of the food worldwide but receive only 10 percent of the incomes.

(b) Earnings :-

Women's average earnings are consistently lower than those of men but in the unorganized sector, which account for 94 percent of economically active women, earning are even lower.

(c) Health :-

In terms of food intake, women suffer greater deprivation intra familiarly (women eat last as part of the culture of self-effacement and services to other and if there is insufficient food the men and children get fed first and the women do without). A very systematic sex bias is also reflected in higher nutritional or caloric deficiency among girls via-avia boys.

(d) Education :-

Of the 960 million illiterate persons in the world, 640 millions or $\frac{2}{3}$ rd are women. In 2001, the literacy rate of women has increased to 54.16 still it is lower than male literacy rate. School enrolment figures for girls have been - and continue to be lower than for boys at all stages and ages, and the drop out rates also higher for girls at every stages from primary to high school.

(e) Politics :-

Political space has always been monopolized by men. Representation of women among member of parliament and state legislations has never exceeded 7 percent and has remained around 5 percent over the years despite the increasing visibility of women. Women's representation at the higher rungs of the decision-making position has also been consistently low.

(f) Socio-cultural Factors :-

The cultural construct of son preference adds to the psychological diffidence of the female child, dowry deaths, violence against women has its roots in the subordination of women at the social level and their vulnerability has not decreased but increased in developing economics as a consequence of social disruptions backlash and a general degeneration values etc.