

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 about various steps in achieving women empowerment.
- To understand the ways and means of achieving women empowerment.

Steps in Women Empowerment :-

There are various steps in achieving women empowerment.

1. The first step begins at a personal level. An individual women develops feelings of personal power, command and self-sufficiency over material and inherent choices she has to make.
2. In the second step, empowerment takes place on an interpersonal level. Here a woman influences the decision making power of another women through their contact and working together.
3. In the third step, they emphasize the goals for social action and social change. A community development programmes develops through a group effort. But there can be possibility of backward linkages also. A community development programmes can lead to individual empowerment and interpersonal empowerment.

Ways and Means of Achieving Women Empowerment :-

Empowerment of women can be achieved through education, women's organization, information technology, science and technology, entrepreneurship, microfinance institutions, law and agriculture.

(a) Education :-

Education plays the most crucial role in empowering women. It is not only generates momentum but also sustain empowerment process in the long run. Empowerment consists of five dimensions, each equally important but none sufficient by itself to enable women to act on their own behalf. Educational settings have the potential to foster all the five dimensions but require the educational programmes to be designed explicitly to achieve each of those ends. It is relevant to point out that one of the important recommendations of the National Policy on education is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education.

To achieve empowerment through education, several concepts must be introduced at appropriate levels. When referring to primary and secondary schooling, empowerment should enable girls to develop the knowledge and skill to nullify and counter. Sexual stereotypes and conceptions of masculinity and femininity that limits the social potential of women. Empowering girls should mean offering them courses with content that not only attack current sexual stereotypes but also provide students with alternative visions of a gender free society.

Gender and women studies programmes have made it possible for student to gain a greater understanding of how gender forces operate in society. These programmes influenced the development and discrimination of new theoretical and methodological approaches dealing with the nature of gender, national development and social change.

Distance education is another way of empowering adult woman. The question that how can woman representatives who are pre-occupied with their political and administrative engagements or woman employees who are busy with their jobs and activities can pursue education in view of paucity of time arises. Distance education is the intermediate and most satisfactory answer.

(b) Entrepreneurship :-

Women's entrepreneurship is both about women's position in society and about the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs faced many obstacles specifically in market their product (including family responsibilities) that have to be overcome in order to give them access to the same opportunities as men. In addition, in some countries, women may experience obstacles with respect to holding property and entering contracts. Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in microenterprises will be encouraged and aggravated. Rural women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to

establish and manage enterprise. Now what is the need is knowledge regarding accessibility to loans, various funding agencies, procedure regarding certificate, awareness on government welfare programmes, motivation, technical skill and support from family, government and other organization. Moreover formation and strengthening of rural women entrepreneurs network must be encouraged. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This network helps to give lectures, printed material imparting first hand technical knowledge in production, processing, procurement, management and marketing among the other women. This will motivate other rural women to engage in micro- entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides, adding to the family income and national productivity. Thus women are empowered through entrepreneurship. Micro entrepreneurship are strengthening the women empowerment and remove the gender inequality.

(c) Science and Technology :-

Science and technology can be effectively used to ease women's work load inside and outside the house involving them as equal partners, recognizing their knowledge, experiences and the significant role they can play in sustainable development with organized orientation and training, there is a great potential for empowering women with appropriate and sustainable technologies. Research findings have shown that with the aid of appropriate developmental programmes women as mother can become effective agents of change in eradicating poverty in current generation and preventing the transmission to the next generation.

(d) Women's Organization :-

Women's organization have come to be recognized as the main source of power, position and strength for women in modern India. A women fight injustices perpetrated by men single handed or also. But, she can do the same collectively through organizations. Women SHGs in rural area, under Stree Shakti Scheme, are doing yeomen service in organizing women power. Women from different sections are being brought together and organized into an association to wage a war on liquor shops and gambling dens, mataka centres etc. and fight for abolishing age old practices like wife beating, polygamy, dowry-connected harassment, devadasi system, child marriages, etc. Besides, the SHG are providing employment opportunities to large masses of illiterate, ignorant and suppressed women folk. A proper leadership among women will go to a long way in empowering them.

(e) Information Technology :-

The single most resource that liberates people from poverty and empower them is knowledge. A society by using knowledge through all its constitutions, endeavours to empower and enrich its people and thus will become a knowledge society. Such knowledge society will need empowerment at all levels and among all the key actions of the society. At this juncture, it is essential to see the possibilities of women's empowerment through information technology. Access to information is the key for economic, social and political empowerment of women. So far no other technology claimed to have given the instant, uncensored, practically feasible, economically viable information to the women folk than the information technology. IT poses new forms of learning, education, health services, livelihood options, governance mechanism and ecommerce options which would lead to the ultimate goal that is woman's empowerment.

(f) Microfinance Institution :-

Microfinance institutions play a dominant role in the empowerment of women. There are basically two schools of thought on the empowerment potential of microfinance programmes, with one school emphasizing the negative aspects, arguing that men in the households tend to appropriate the loans and benefits from the loans. This school see the household as a site of conduct, where women and men struggling for control over resources. The other school emphasizes the positive aspects, given the evidence that households with loans generally have higher income and level of consumption regardless of the gender dynamics within the household. This school emphasizes a more consensual conception of the households, with benefits for the entire family also considered as benefits to women.

Different research and case studies on the impact of microfinance for women's empowerment have been carried out, though the majority of these studies have been undertaken in South Asia given the longer presence of microfinance institutions there. Many of these research studies show that microfinance institutions help a lot in empowerment of women.

(g) Law :-

Empowerment of women is an input which is intended to eliminate their subordination and establish equality. Empowerment is a positive concept. It requires affirmative state action in support of those who are to be empowered. The law can create such empowerment by way of conferring rights directly to the person whom it intend to empower by imposing liability on other persons forwards the persons to be empowered.

For the empowerment of women in India, certain existing laws have been amended and modified according to need of time by creating penal sanction against certain type of behaviour, which infringe, deprive or derogate the dignity of women.

The Indian constitution has the following provisions for making women at par with men :-

- (i) Article 14 of the constitution guarantees to all equal protections of laws and equal before law. Both these expressions have also been used in "universal declaration of human rights". The equality before law is guaranteed to all without regard to sex, race, colour or nationality.
- (ii) Article 15(3), empowers the state to make special provision for women. Women require special treatment due to their very nature. "Women's physical structure and performance and maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence and her physical well being becomes an objective."
- (iii) Article 16(2) lays down the rule that no citizen can be discriminated for any employment under the state on ground of religion, race, caste or sex.
- (iv) Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243D provides that in every panchayat, seats shall be reserved for SC, ST and not less than one third shall be reserved at village level shall be reserved in such manner as the legislature of the state may be law provide.
- (v) Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243T provides that one-third seats in Municipal Corporations shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the municipality.

(h) Agriculture :-

The National Agricultural Policy of India (2000) and the Indian National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) have highlighted the need for incorporating gender issues in the agricultural development agenda to provide recognition of women's role as farmers and producers of crops and livestock, users of technology, active agents in marketing and processing and storage of food and agricultural labourers.

Various central sector schemes are in operation in different states on women in agriculture. The Central Government had launched a scheme under the eight five year plan to make women farmers self-reliant by providing them opportunities to avail themselves of the benefits and opportunities of the existing agriculture system. The project was implemented on a pilot basis with one district each from Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In Kerala, the project was implemented in Palakkad since 1994.

The State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) Kerala, through

Kudumbashree has increasingly recognized the programme on "Women in Agriculture", as a powerful tool for empowerment of women. Lease land farming, skill development, agriculture business, agri-processing etc. are their thrust areas. The micro-enterprises strategy engage in agriculture related enterprises, such as vegetable farming, crop nurseries, gardening units, mushroom cultivation, vermin compost production, bee keeping, dairy hatchery units, backyard poultry, agro-processing, produce marketing

etc.