

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 indicators of women empowerment.
- To understand the role of self help groups in women empowerment.

Indicators of Empowerment :-

There are several indicators of empowerment. At the individual level, participation in crucial decision making process, ability to prevent violence, self confidence and self-esteem, improved health and nutrition conditions, etc. are the major indicators. At the community levels, the important indicators are existence of women's organizations, increased number of women leaders, involvement of women in designing development tools and application of appropriate technology etc. At the national level, the indicators are awareness of her social and political rights, adequate representation in legislative bodies, integration of women in particular in national development plans etc.

Improvement in economic status gets reflected in improved social, political and cultural status of women. Self-confidence and self-esteem of women proceed simultaneously with

their empowerment. In brief, all indicators can be classified into two broad categories namely visible and invisible indicators. Amongst visible indicators, mention could be made of women's representation in parliaments. Thirty percent representation is a visible indicators of women empowerment. The share of women representatives in the national parliaments of a few developed and developing countries is shown in Table 1.

**Table : Seats in parliaments held by women
(as percentage of total)**

| Developing countries | Percentage | Developed countries | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| China | 21.8 | Sweden | 45.0 |
| Pakistan | 21.6 | Denmark | 38.0 |
| Morocco | 10.8 | Norway | 36.4 |
| India | 8.8 | Finland | 36.1 |
| Indonesia | 8.0 | Netherlands | 36.0 |
| Nepal | 5.9 | Iceland | 34.0 |
| Egypt | 2.4 | Australia | 33.0 |
| Bangladesh | 2.0 | New Zealand | 29.0 |

(Source : Human Development Report : 2003)

It can be seen from the Table that both in developed and developing countries women hold less seats than the men. However, in developed countries their representation is relatively higher than in developing countries. In this context, it can be said that increasing the number of women in parliament and also raising women's visibility in position of

authority and decision are quite necessary for their empowerment politically as well as economically.

The Beijing World Conference on Women (1995) proposed the following qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating women's empowerment.

The qualitative indicators of empowerment :-

1. Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence.
2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy, etc. depending on the programmes.
3. Increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for children.
4. Increase or decrease in workloads of women as a result of new programmes.
5. Changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and on the community.
6. Visible increase or decrease in levels of democratic violence and other forms of violence, perpetrated on women and girl child.
7. Response to and changes in social and other customs that are anti-women. For example : child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows etc.
8. Visible changes in women's participation levels for instance : Are more women attending public meetings and participating in training programmes?, Are women demanding participation in other events related to their lives?
9. Increase in bargaining/negotiating power of the women as an individual in the home and community as well as in collectives of women.
10. Increased access to and ability to get information and knowledge not only about the project but also about what affects their lives.

11. Formation of cohesive and articulate women's groups/collective at the village level, district, block and state levels.
12. Positive changes in social attitudes amongst the community members towards discrimination against women and child girl.
13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household.
14. Women's decision making over the kind of work she is doing. Is her income in expenditure in her control or is she still subservient to male members in the family?

The qualitative indicators of empowerment :-

1. Demographic trends in maternal/mortality rate, fertility rates, sex rates, life expectancy at birth, average age of marriage etc.
2. Numbers of women participating in different development programmes.
3. Greater access and control over community resource/government schemes/services, for example crèches, credit saving groups, co-operatives, schools, wells etc.
4. Visible changes in physical health/status, nutrition levels.
5. Changes in male/female literacy level - primary, secondary and adult literacy including enrolment and retention rates.
6. Participation rates of women in political processes at the local level.

Empowerment of Women through SHGs :-

The issues of empowerment of women moved center stage during the last three decades of the second millennium, mainly through the efforts of the United Nations by declaring 1975 as the women's year and the decade 1975-82 as the women's decade. This period coincided

with the sixth plan period in India when the approach was shifted from welfare to development and further efforts during the subsequent plans culminated in the framing of a National Policy for Empowerment Women approved by the cabinet on 20th March 2001. However, despite constitutional guarantee of equality and justice, legislative support of a plethora of acts and introduction of policies and programmes, the goals of gender equality and justice, empowerment of women still remains a distant dream for Indian women.

The human development index as calculated by the UNDP is based on three major components life expectancy at birth, literacy and per capita purchasing power. Among the 174 countries ranked, India gets the 128th rank. Gender Development Index is also available for 143 countries in which India ranks 108.

Indian scenario presents a dismal picture on several key indicators contributing to human development. The first alarming signal is the sex ratio adverse to women. As per the 2011 census of District, the sex ratio is 947 and it is further disappointing that 0-6 yrs group, the sex ratio is only 927.

The poor health of women coupled with low literacy profiles adversely affect their work participation rate and the resulting standard of living. Hence our Human Development Index contributes to be at the power running of the ladder.

Women are the bearers of the next generation, the caregivers in the family. But they suffer every deprivation. They are the beasts of burden, attending to all domestic chores, fetching fuel, fodder and water; generally from long distances, working from dawn to dusk and no recognition in the system of national accounts. Even when they do bring in some income, they spend it all on the family and struggle to battle in poverty. Often they also finance the husband's 'leisure activities' like alcohol, only to be beaten when he is drunk.

Despite all our plans, female adult literacy in the country has just touched 54 percent in 2001. This leaves 46 percent of our women illiterate and unaware of their rights. It is true that education open up new vistas to women but education alone does not solve problems. For the mass of our women it cannot be education of traditional kind.

What they need, is training in vocation skills, coupled with a basic knowledge related to their local situations. Special incentives to encourage the education of girls in regular schools particularly in out rural areas and urban slums are an urgent necessity.

India, like any other developing countries has a large unorganized sector where the majority of the women workers are found. This sector has been largely neglected in so far as provision of support services and social security benefits are concerned. Even the basic laws, like the Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Maternity Benefit Act, etc. have not benefited them. The enforcement machinery of the labour departments, has totally failed to give this sector the support and the protection, that it deserves.

The central and state governments have over the years initiated several programmes to change the mindset of rural women with incentives to enable them women to live in dignity. Religious heads and law courts have also responded to this critical need to change altitudes in families and bring about a shift from the 'son preference' syndrome. More action would be necessary in this direction, with media campaigns to remove gender bias.

Participation in the freedom struggle brought political awakening to our women. Reservations in the local bodies have ensured women's entry into the political process at the grass root levels. There is now 33% reservation in a Assemblies and Parliaments and government is doing to pass the women reservation bills of 50% in near future, in order to empower women and bring them into leadership positions. But empowerment is important

than political participation. Women have to be equipped to help themselves, they have to be made aware to their rights and enable to discover their own potential.

Empowerment of women is a crucial factor in the eradication of poverty, as the women are the key contributors to the economy and in combating poverty through both remunerative and non-remunerative work at home, in the community and in the work place.

Nutrition and Health Empowerment :-

Nutrition well being is a sustainable force for health and development and for maximization of human genetic potential. In fact, the measurement of national development is by nutrition and health indicators like neo-natal morality rate, infant morality rate, mortality under 5 year, maternal mortality rate, crude death rate and life expectancy at birth. The nutritional status of the community has, therefore been recognized as an important indicator of national development. In other words, malnutrition is an impediment in national development and hence assumes the status of national problem and not merely a sectoral problem.

Nutrition, health checkup, blood donation, immunization (pulse polio) camp has been conducting by self help groups.

Promotion of village level women's organization is now being recognized as an important step towards the improvement of women's nutrition and health status.

Self help groups do have a significant role to play in the lives of women.

Economic Perspective of Empowerment of Women :-

Women's participation in income generating activities is believed to increase their status and decision making power, with employment.

The economic contribution is related to their status and role in the family and in the society. If a woman is not economically self-dependent, she can never claim an equal status with man. The problem of poverty cannot be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to women. Even where there is a male earner, women's earnings form a major part of the income of poor households. Moreover, women contribute a large share of what they earn to basic family maintenance than men; increases in women's income translates more directly into better child health, nutrition and family well being.

Women's participation in the labour force also brings about changes in awareness and attitudes, which may have long term benefits such as to health and education programmes, reduction in birth-rate, thrift and savings etc. Economic independence of women will create far reaching social changes and prove as necessary weapon for them to face injustice and discrimination.

The goal of poverty reduction and empowerment of women can be effectively achieved if poor women could organize into groups for community participation as well as for use of their rights in various services related to their economic and social well being.

Social Empowerment of Women :-

Gandhiji said that women are the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minute detail of the activities of life and she has a right of freedom and liberty with man. But today in India with special reference to the villages, we see that by sheer force of a viscous systems even the most ignorant and worthless man have been enjoying a superiority over women which do not deserve and ought not to have. We can however, see that the trends have changed to a great extent with more and more women coming out and competing with men in many spheres. We can see today women and all spheres of life with no exception.

Constitutionally and legal, man and women are equal. In real practice, however, women still finds a secondary place. Example of inequalities galore in respect of women-men birth rate, education and participation in matters of financial and political. Atrocities are perpetrated on women. She is viewed not as a human being bit a delectable thing.

Efforts are being made to change this situation and bring about a stage where man and women be viewed equally. Many schemes are being implemented for equal education and equal opportunities of employment so that, women would have equal rights. Consequently, there is seen some progress in this regard. As the women has now increased presence in banks, gram panchayats, various government sectors etc. her social status is seen somewhat increased. However, this process is slow to get a boost to this process, mindset of the society as a whole should change.

The social empowerment means that the women should get an important place in her family and society and should have a right to enable her to make use of available resources. The member of SHGs are mostly women. They save money and invest in SHG. They can use it at the time of their needs. As they can have in their hand, they get some status in her family. It has resulted in developing self-confidence, selfesteem and self-respect.

Political Empowerment :-

The political element entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize the surrounding situation for social transformation, leadership qualities are also developed in women, because they more participate in the social activities like trying to solve the problem of their society or village.

In 1991, constitutional provision for 33% reserved seat in Gram panchayat in our country came into being. In the beginning, the process of participation of women slow, but now the situation is fast changing. Due to advent of SHG, women were able to see the outside the

world. They understood the processes involved in solving the local problems through political participation. By and by, their participation in political process started increasing. In SHGs, they found an opportunity to become a leader of SHGs. In some places, local SHGs acted as pressure groups for or against a particular political candidate in Panchayat elections. The SHGs plays an important role to hone the leadership skill in women in the rural region.

Thus self help group has proved that an important means in taking in process of women empowerment to rural region. Thus the SHG programme has been successful in strengthening collective self help capacities of the poor at the local level, meeting their peculiar needs leading to their empowerment. The rural poor, with the intermediation of voluntary organization also join together for self help to secure better economic growth. This has resulted in the formation of large number of SHGs in the country, and the SHGs have mobilized savings and recycled the resources generated among the members.