

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 rural scenario of women empowerment.
- To know development policies for women.
- To understand the milestones and challenges of women empowerment.

Rural Scenario of women empowerment:-

The rural scenario is still one where the women folk in general remain at the periphery. With heavy responsibilities of tending their families and the farms. It is doubtful if they would have the time, despite the inclination, to attend meetings of the Gram Sabha where all adult women are members. What is more, certain factors like caste, feudalism, apathy and family status do come in the way. Though we have given an equal status to women and rightly so, it is yet to be seen if, they are really motivated to contribute their mite in such meetings.

Development Policies for Women

Since the 1950s, when development planning first came on the international spotlight, a number of approaches, having different effects on women, have been tried. They are as follows:

- 1] **Welfare:** This was the earliest approach. It dominated from 1950 to 1970 and is still widely used. Its main purpose was to enable women to be better mothers influencing their role in the society.
- 2] **Equity:** This was the original approach of women in development and was utilized during the decade for women 1975-85. Women were seen as active participants in the development process.
- 3] **Anti-Poverty:** It aimed at increasing the productivity of poor women and saw their poverty as a problem of underdevelopment, not of subordination.
- 4] **Efficiency:** This is the most prevalent approach used today. Its aim is to ensure that development is efficient and effective.
- 5] **Empowerment:** An approach articulated by third World feminists since the mid1980s. It aims at empowering women through grater self- reliance and sees women's oppression as stemming not only from male patriarchal attitudes but also from colonial and neo-colonial oppression.

Legislative Support for Women :-

The Government has given greater focus to issues relating to women through creation of an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development, initiation of legislation that

has taken the country closer to complete legal equality for women, gender budgeting and initiation of programs for greater inclusion of women in all walks of life.

The Government has so far passed/amended five women specific legislations viz. [I] The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 [ii] The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986) [iii] The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 [iv] The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988) [v] Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and 43 women related legislations. However, effectiveness of the laws can be seen/felt if women's are political and social empowered.

Women's Reservation :-

- 1] **The new Act 2006** initiated by the Government has provided for reservation for women for the first time and wards have been reserved accordingly in the elections to cantonment boards.
- 2] **Women's Reservation Bill 2010:** Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill proposes to provide 'thirty three per cent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India and State legislative assemblies reserved for women. The Women's Reservation Bill has been a political raw nerve for nearly a decade now. Due to female feticides, infanticide and issues related to women's health, sex ratio in India is alarming at 1.06 males per female. It is expected this bill will change the society to give equal status to women.

Financial Focus:

- 1] The Government has introduced gender budgeting for improving the sensitivity of programs and schemes to women's welfare. The budgetary outlay for 100 per cent women specific programs has been rising every year and this year it is Rs. 11,460 crore.

- 2] Ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the beneficiaries of all Government schemes are women and girl children has been laid down as a key target in the 11th plan.

Girl's Education :-

2,180 residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya schools have been sanctioned and are providing elementary education to 1,82,000 out of school girls. *Gaun Ki Beti, Kisori Balika Divas Yojana, Ladii Laksmi Yojana, Cycle Praday Yojana*, are the programs run by the Government for empowering the girls in India.

Gender Inequality :-

The principle of gender equality and protection of women's right has been receiving attention from the days of independence. Accordingly, the concern of the country in safeguarding the rights and the privilege of women found its best expression in the constitution of India. While article 14 confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social activities without any discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, caste etc. Article 15 (3) empowers the State to make affirmative discrimination in favor of women. Similarly Article 16 provides an equality of opportunities in the matter of public appointments for all citizens, yet, another Article 39 mentions that the State shall direct its policy towards providing men and women equally, the right to means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work. Article 42 directs the State to make provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 51 (A) (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women. To make this *de jure* equality into a *de facto* one, special legislations have been enacted from time to time in support of women.

On 8 March 1996, on the occasion of **International Women's Day**, the parliament passed resolution to set up a Standing Committee for the "Improvement of the Status of Women" in India and the Committee on Empowerment of Women was constituted in April 1997. **National Commission for Women** [NCW] a statutory body set up in 1992, safeguards the rights and interests of women. It continues to pursue its mandated role and activities viz.; safeguarding women's rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities, sexual harassment of women at work place, conducting *Parivarik/Mahila Lok Adalats*, legal awareness programs/camps, review of both women specific and women related legislations, investigates into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc.

Milestones and Challenges

[1] Convergence of service delivery at village levels:

There are two main programs in the Department of Women and Child Development, which aim at convergence of services delivery at the village level, namely. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Integrated Women's Empowerment Program (IWEP). The ICDS network through *Anganwadi* Centres reaches 85 per cent of the villages and hamlets in the country. The IWEP (erstwhile *Indira Mahila Yojana*) which extends to 650 Blocks operates through the self-Help-Groups of women. Both these programs can be effective vehicles for the implementation of the National Population Policy. It is, therefore, critical that both the schemes are universalized.

[2] Formation of Self-Help-Groups:

The formation of Self-Help-Groups as a basis for the social and economic empowerment of deprived and disadvantaged women has been found to be a successful mechanism for

the organization, mobilization and self development of women. This has been tested through the IWEP and *Sawa Shakti* projects of the Department of Women and Child Development and is being replicated in a number of programs of other Departments. These groups can facilitate the process of economic empowerment through thrift and savings, training and skill up gradation and access to credit and other productive resources. They can also be instruments of social empowerment through awareness generation and convergence of delivery of schemes. With the feeling of ownership and management of their own resources and savings, poor women have been able to choose their priorities and have even been found to cover the cost of additional nutrition and health gaps. The success of this approach has resulted in universalization of this mode of organization in all the southern States. There is a need to replicate this mode throughout the country.

[3] Access to Resources:

The issue of improved health and nutrition is intimately linked to access to and control over local, social, and economic structures. For women to be empowered we need to ensure: [a] equitable access and distribution of resources like land, credit etc. [b] access to education. [c] access to health /nutrition [d] access to water and sanitation. This implies that resources should flow into these areas to bridge the gender gap and that systems be developed to plan, implement and monitor the 'bridging' of the gap. Ownership of land tends to reduce fertility by providing an alternate means of security. Similarly education has its own impact on reproductive behavior of both men and women. Improving the access of women/households in rural areas and urban slums to safe sources of drinking water will free them from the drudgery of fetching water and in decreasing the morbidity resulting from water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera. This will impact positively on the health and energy levels of women. [e] access to technologies which can reduce the

drudgery of women on the various works performed by them both within and outside the household is also a very useful intervention for empowering the women.

[4] Women Component Plan:

While the Planning Commission has already incorporated the concept of Women's Component Plan in Five Year Plans whereby 30 per cent of funds actually flow to women, it is important that guidelines are revisited to ensure their effectiveness.

[5] Development of Gender Disaggregated Data System:

One of the constraints in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of plans for the development of women is the absence of gender segregated data on various indices of development at the State, district and sub district levels. These lacunae in our statistical system should be addressed on a priority basis.

[6] Freedom from Violence :

Women and girls face violence in various forms at various stages of their life cycle. This takes the form of female foeticide and infanticide, rape, dowry death and more indirect forms such as desertion or abandonment of older women. This calls for a multipronged strategy of implementation of laws, awareness, community sanctions etc.

[7] Sustained Media Campaign:

One of the most effective interventions that can take place to address the issues of attitude and mind sets of men and women of the community and also of the functionaries of the government - the bureaucracy, police and judiciary is media campaigns. A sustained campaign through the print, electronic and folk media is necessary on various issues related

to empowerment of women, health and nutrition, laws, value of the girl child, violence against women etc.

Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and self help groups can be very effective in the process of empowerment through participatory communication. Participatory communication can help women to change their attitudes, behaviors and styles of communication. Empowerment is a complex term and may be measured in terms of *Women's* freedom to shape their lives, their control over resources, their access to basic facilities, their level of political participation, their ability to take their own decisions and their ability to remove hindrances in their path to progress. Selfhelp groups of women have been found to be very effective grassroots institutions in facilitating access for women to means of development be it information, financial and material resources or services. The 'self-help group' mode should be encouraged, so that the groups become dynamic change agents in bringing about empowerment and socioeconomic development of women. Organizing women into self-help groups marks the beginning of a major process of empowering women by strengthening their capacity for collective decision making and entrepreneurship development. Gender sensitization training has been developed to initiate the task of attitude change within male-dominated extension and research bureaucracies and donor agencies.