

Women empowerment: The effective solution to prevent gender atrocities

¹Dr. S. Sam Kumar & ^{*2}Dr. S. Sushma Raj

¹Former Director, SOS Children's Villages of India, Nerellavasa colony, Bheemunipatnam, Visakhapatnam (India)

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, GITAM Institute of Science, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 15 May 2019

Keywords

Women, empowerment, atrocities, education, equality, literacy.

*Corresponding Author

Email: s.sushmaraj[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Educating women is critical to the socio-economic development of women in India. True empowerment can only be possible only when the women have access to higher education. Female literacy is consistently lower than that of males throughout the world. Girls reaching puberty are discouraged for 'outside- village' higher education and encouraged for marriage. They are taught to become 'able' women for future house-wife jobs. The harassment of the girl is, to a large extent, tolerated by the social milieu. In such a grave situation, Empowerment of women is an effective solution that would help them to be 'self reliant' with a position to enable them to face any difficult situation. It is not just economical in essence but an intellectual enlightenment leading to the social empowerment of women.

1. Introduction

The piecemeal approach in dealing with the atrocities of women often yields poor results of no avail. Just like the use of antibiotics, when used in lower doses, increasing the resistance of the injecting virus, steps to tackle gender crimes with low intensity only enhance their occurrence. The offender is 'educated' in the methods of escape and the detail of operational justice, educational centers in ethics, inactive new laws, sharpening the police performances, cultural training courses, gender sensitization programs, hollow appreciations of woman courage, traditional invocations, moral preaching's, rehabilitation of the wounded birds and even occasional punishments of severity are all going ineffective in curing the wide spread epidemic of the world in general and thickly populated Asia in particular. The social reaction has the inherent weakness of empathizing with 'aggrieved' in the first phase and shifting to sympathizing with the accused in next phase which lays more emphasis on the 'defense' of the accused than the 'prosecutorial' justice to the victim. This is more apparent in 'sexual' atrocities when the women in question are diffident to point out the offender. Nature of offence from eve-teasing, molestation, harassment, forced-sex and rape in that increasing order increases the reticence of women to witness and withstand publicity. It is purely an insult adding to the 'already made' injury where the weaker- sex rarely struggles to win and punish the offender. The complexity of factors in action to eradicate the evil is haunting the genuine souls in search of a solution. It was Ambedkar, the father of emancipation of weaker sections in India who remarked that the "gender inequality needs to be ended through willingness, ability and courage to challenge the dominance of the received and entrenched norms of male- world".

Empowerment:

Empowerment is a multidimensional process which enables a class of people to realize their identity and power in all phases of life. It consists of "greater access to knowledge, greater autonomy in decision making to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles that influence their custom, belief and practices. "(Rama Rao and Naidu, 2010). Empowerment of women would help them to be 'self reliant' with a position to

enable them to face any difficult situation. It is not just economical in essence but an intellectual enlightenment leading to the social empowerment of women. It is APJ Abdul Kalam, the former president of India who observed", when women are empowered, society with stability is assured, and their thoughts and value systems change towards a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation". Women would gain power only when men respect them properly which will follow when the women are empowered in the social structure with intention. The cultural perception lays greater value on males than females and attitudes and customs are mutually helping in placing little attention on girls. Poverty and illiteracy drive the girls to ignorance, from there to early marriages and early children and there from to inferiority before males and easy surrender to their wishes and fancies. When government of India declared 2001 as the Women's year meaning that " Women are equal partners to men and the traditional mentality acquired from the past to look at woman as 'sex object' and the past methods like Sati system, child marriage and Dowry system have helped discrimination and different form of atrocities". Syamal rao and Sanyasirao (2010) remarked that parents have to encourage the girl children in the process of empowerment and not just as 'loving mother, caring sister, obedient wife, good manager of a family and 'successful' person of a life, all of which lead to the 'non-empowerment' by spirit. The central issue in determining the state of women is 'empowerment', Rao and Rao observed. "True empowerment will be reached only when the women are given a) higher education, b) participation in the political decision process, c) injected into higher employment and d) given methodical support by organizational activities of the world.

Education:

Educating women is critical to the socio-economic development of women in India. True empowerment can only be possible only when the women have access to higher education. Female literacy is consistently lower than that of males throughout the world

UNESCO report of 1995 has given comparative literacy rates as follows

	F %	M %
South- Saharan Africa	47	66
Arab States	44	68
Southern Asia (Including India)	37	63
Least Developed Countries of world	38	60

Ramarao and Tirupathi Naidu (2010) in their article "Women empowerment through education" mentioned that the modified "National Policy of Education" (NPE) of 1992 gives an interventionist role to correcting the imbalances and gives the women their rightful place. To achieve this objective, (NPE) a number of programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid day

meals, National Program me for educating girls at elementary level and Kasturba Gandhi Residential Schools for girls have been started. The following table gives the sex-wise enrolment of students in higher secondary and intermediate levels in India.

Tab.1:

Year	Boys	Girls in (Million)
1951	1.3	0.2
1961	2.2	0.4
1971	5.7	1.9
1981	7.6	3.4
1991	12.8	6.3
2001	16.9	10.7

Source.

(Education statistics – 2002-2003, MHRD, Dept of education Govt of India)

Tab.2

Year	Percentage of Literacy.		
	Boys	Girls	Gap
1951	27.16	8.86	18.3
1966	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.85	54.16	21.70

The high dropout rate in girls (45%) as against (41%) in boys is also responsible for the same. Rao and Naidu explain that social and economic systems supported by patriarchal values are responsible for the dropout rates. Girls reaching puberty are discouraged for 'outside- village' higher education

and encouraged for marriage. They are taught to become 'able' women for future house-wife jobs.

Another factor in higher education working against the women- participation is category of subject division. Tab.3 gives the enrolment by gender in different courses in the country in 2005-06.

	Women %	Men%	Lag%
Arts	45.8	54.2	8.4
Sciences	40.0	60.0	20
Commerce	37.0	63.0	26
Engineering	23.3	76.6	53.3
Medicine	46.7	53.3	6.6
Law	16.7	83.3	66.6

The women participation is nearer to males only in arts and far off in sciences, law and engineering technology which are the crucial fields of domination in the society.

(Source: Economic and political weekly: Feb, 17th, 2007. UGC Annual report-2005-06)

2. Political Decision Process

It is a well known fact that the socio-economic structure is monitored by political manifestation. While the weaker sections of the society determine the democratic strength of a nation, their empowerment needs strong and visible political decisions. Though women belong to the weaker section group thoroughly,

political power is wielded by men exclusively in all forms of power structure, social and constitutional. But for the reservations in all power structures from village to parliament, women cannot be elected even as a member of the village panchayat. Male chauvinism refuses to elect female as a leader much less to follow her orders. Women Sarpanchs elected by reservation are sometimes acting as a 'formal'

figure heads while the husbands actually rule the villages by proxy. This drama is enacted at all levels of power structure including the chief minister ship, as had happened in the case of Rabri Devi of Bihar. Numerous cases exist among MLAs, MPs and ministers when she was thought to be a puppet in the hands of political over lords. The woman elected or nominated, wields power to decide things in favor of exploited womankind. Mrs. Shila Dikshit Chief Minister of Delhi, pleaded inability when Nirbhaya gang-rape incident took place. Even the so-called efficient and strong political leaders among women, could not do much to the haunting theme of sex-atrocities on women. Surrounded by the sycophancy of male voices around, the women are trapped by the labels like "she is a man in vigor and vitality" like Mamatha Benerjee, C.M of West Bengal who went on record saying that "rapes and molestations are due to obscene dresses and odd-time movements of ladies". Though occasionally, few lady heads of state or prime ministers emerged in Islamic countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, little could be done to exercise power to emancipate women as the 'Power seat' is practically seized by male chauvinists when the women in power do lip service to stall the atrocities on women.

It should be accepted that in spite of every weak system, women in power to decide things is crucial for their empowerment. The 10% of women in Indian parliament today do matter for their development. The proposed bill to enhance their reservation in parliament to 33.3 % would see 180 women members of parliament when a sea of change takes place for their empowerment, which is exactly the reason for the male parliamentarians of all parties successfully united to stall the bill from becoming an act. Unfortunate fact is that even the women members of those parties are 'convinced' of the argument that women reservation shall not be increased which would create 'problems' in their electoral strategies. Such is the order of patriarchal power, displayed the maximum extent in political section, the leading section of social-cultural elements of society.

3. U.N's two week campaign

The secretary general of United Nations, Banki- Moon has not only called Nov.25, as the Orange-Day(protection of women against gender violence) but has initiated a world-wide campaign for 16 days on gender sensitization to end up on Dec 10th, the Human rights day. Seminars on a global scale were called upon to fight to the evil-practices like bride burring, minor abuse and clitoridectomy. (A.Prasanna Kumar, Bulletin of the Centre for policy studies, Vol.18.. No.2.2013). This global pandemic involves 70 % of women in the world in their lifetime. The secretary general's call for the 25th Nov as 'Orange' day campaign to count the practices of prostitution, forced sex, slavery and intimate partner violence leading to 1.8 billion women as non-productive mothers. Nov.25 is chosen as the orange day to commemorate the brutal assassination of the three political activists, Miratel Sisters in 1960 as ordered by the Dominica ruler Rafeal Trujilla. Ruchitra Gupta in an article (May, 2011) has observed that "violence against women is the result of unlimited materialistic approach of the society. About three million girls in India are prostituted, who are raped by 9 to 10 men every night. The girls are of 9-13 years, when raped, and die surely before reaching their thirties". Prasanna

kumar mentioned that "15000 girls are sold annually in India, to Palestine and Bangladesh for kidney sale after exhausting them in flesh trade". It is named as development by the 'creative' thinkers of male-chauvinism.

Nancy P.Pavel, American ambassador in India participated in the 16 day orange movement of 2013 which called for 'equality of women and resistance to gender violence', which she claimed is a part of U.S. Foreign policy, not just for human rights problem but as a factor of economic policy which is influenced by female-harassment. (Saakshi – Telugu News paper, 10th DEC,2013). It was John Kerry, the secretary of state USA, who remarked during the "orange" period that "capital investment on women leads to empowerment of women who in turn become innovative creators of new and peaceful world".

4. Women Employment

Surely, women employment is a vital factor of women empowerment. Employment leads to self- confidence, self-reliance and self- respect. Strangely, women employment is not a corollary of women-education in India. Patriarchal cynicism holds up women from working, even after higher education, in the name of family welfare, family dignity or so-called security. House maids, daily wage laborers, casual workers and farm workers, are not considered as employees as their income is uncertain and may be terminated at will by the pleasure of males. A teacher, nurse, doctor, engineer, a programmer and a corporate manager are deemed as employees in case of women (Karuna Channa, 2007... Globalization, higher education of gender economic and political weekly.. Vol.X211, No.7, Feb.17, 2007). In case of the non-formal employment referred above, women instead of being empowered get weakened also as their physical strength is lost and financial strength is appropriated by the husband, father or father-in law. Even though University Education Commission (1948-49) suggested that special requirements of women must be given in home economics, it was ignored deliberately (Chalam,K.S. 1993-Educational Policy for Human resources Development. Rawat Pub.Jaipur).

Though women are found in large numbers in I.T, science, space research and management sectors due to changing norms and educational facilities, most of them are from middle and upper middle classes reflecting the class structure of Indian society. Weaker sex, from weaker sections of the society are withheld at smaller employment (Rajaiah, B-1987, Economics of education, Mittal Publications, New Delhi.) and very few reach the higher levels.

R.V.Jaya Krishna, Pulla rao.D and P.Jayanand Kumar (2010) observed that " as long as the society remains male dominated, laws are openly violated in the cases of women in questions of health, education or employment". In most of the home-based work, no wages and only low wages are paid with irregular, insecure and inadequate opportunities for growth. Even in the small jobs like teachers, women employment (in 2004-05, Commission and Director of School Education Hyd,A.P) is 45.1 % in primary schools(54.98 Males), 41.4 % in upper primary (58.6 Males) and 40.1 % in high schools (59.9 % males), Though the increase of female teacher is due to

implementation of 33.3 % reservation for women in A.P, it cannot be generalized for Indian conditions, assumed to be natural in the absence of reservation, when the rules can snatch away a lion's share.

With the increase of higher education in women the number of employed women in the world rose to 1.2 billion by 2007 as against 1.8 billion men. Today women professionals in management, I.T and science sectors out shine the male counterparts in the multinational world. Divya Nigaron(2008) remarked that most corporate companies have started realizing that women officials in their business give enormous opportunities to help faster business”.

Kathleen Patterson et.al (2008) observed that still 40% dearth of women exists in senior management positions. At present India has 14% of top managerial positions handled by women, followed by 13% in Philippines and 9% in Hong Kong (Ravinder reddy.V.2008). They have been working for 60 hours a week in this position as against 48 hours a week a few years back. Even though women work for longer hours with more dedication, they earn a fraction of what males earn, even facing the challenge of learning to balance both 'home and employment'.

However the factor of discrimination did not disappear but has taken in India a metamorphosis in case of women in higher employment. Though women have begun earning money and more in higher circles, male ego works by using the family – sentiment. Love, child bearing and family welfare are still in the court of women's game and men are exploiting the feminine-sentiments, in case of an ego clash, (Divya Nigam-2008) the woman is threatened with divorce, desertion and bigamy. Murder is the last method, in case these three weapons do not work. Harassment of IAS officers, film stars, senior journalist and political personalities exists day in and day out, in spite of the women's higher employment and larger incomes.

5. Discussion

Empowerment of women was considered as an essential step and was first introduced as the International women's conference In Nairobi in 1958, and UNESCO endorsed 30 % women in all levels of decision making to make her free economically, socially and politically. 'There are many factors that impose the process of her political empowerment like socio-economic, infrastructure awareness, access to information, personal and familiar training and media exposure'.. (Susheela,k. 1993) Govt of India, after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments worked in political up surf for women in local self governments. Sheela (2011) remarked that "After the Beijing platform of action was opted in 1995, global average of women's participation in national politics increased from 11.3% in1996 to 17% in 2006. In the developing countries, 19 countries reached the 30% target also. Whereas India struggled from a meager 4.41 % in 1952 to 8.3 % in 2004. (Tab.1) in Lok Sabha membership for Women". In legislatures it was around 10-13 % and in states like Mizoram, Nepal and Pondicherry women percentage was zero.

The development of women's status in independent India did certainly 8%. Female literacy improved from 15.35% in

1961 to 54.16 % in 2001. Gross enrolment of girls in upper primary schools increased from 11.3% in 1961 to 65.1% in 2005 and women teacher employment did rise from 62,000 in 1961 to 801,000 in 2005 and women workers' the work participation rate (for total women eligible to work) increased from 23.1 % in 1981 to 33.3% in 2005 (Source: Ministry of HRD.. Govt of India. Educational Statistics.2004-05).

Numerous schemes for women's development were undertaken for her health, safety, housing, maternity, child care, dignity of social existence and employment (Lilly Grace and Purushottam,2011) during the 60 years of independent India. Much debate was undertaken to identify the issues, modify the projects and expedite the empowerment phenomenon. Ironically, the atrocities on women increased at a faster rate, overtakes the empowerment exercise. In their article Grace and Purushottam entitled "How far empowerment of women attained in India.. Some issues". Enlisting the factors, Patnaik (2000) identified that women's empowerment is a process to gain control on mental, human and intellectual resources and access to money, home and society to wield power. In spite of the huge task undertaken by government, private organizations, NGO's, women's liberation activists and international agencies, the traditional concepts of patriarchal mould are not allowing the results to infiltrate into depth. The age old norms over social behavior of women to be modest, submissive, wild, soft and self effacing are so well tutored by male society then they cannot change into the empowerment process, whose arsenal included vocal, assertive, competitive, articulate, rational and ambitious attitude (Sai Sujatha and Dharma Lakshmi, 2011).

Tab.1 shows that during 1967 to 1980, the women percentage of Lok Sabha seats dwindled to 5.9 to 4.22 to 3.41 and 5.2. Ironically the period is the regime of effective woman prime minister Indira Gandhi who has all the qualities of 'empowerment' referred about. She was frequently referred to as the 'only man' in the cabinet and non-assertive characters. Indira Gandhi did not do anything specific to boost women's empowerment, nor did she publicly wage a war against patriarchy. This attitude of individualism is prevalent in other political woman –leaders too which leads to rebate the spirit of empowerment (Sahay Sushma..1998). it was Karl Marilee (1995) who unmarked that women empowerment means giving the power to an individual women to say 'no' to what she does not like and giving freedom to exercise her will..” Male chauvinism struggles hard to see that she does not get the real freedom to excuse her will and continues be invisible and marginalized in decision making, leading to a feminist perspective in political decision. (Richard Martland,1994). Male policies around the 'women leader' try to neutralize the potential and do not get any advantage for woman kind.

As part of the tide of times, male reformers participate in the 'empowerment' as a matter of routine. Some others pretend in the women's liberation movement to gain political mileage for themselves. They would to go to any extent to convince the women's vote bank that 'he' is the savior of women kind. They try for winning their hearts, even falling on their feet only to stoop to conquer. Woman's empowerment, through an ideal program me of the world at large is

constrained by rare is ones and reaction of the society, managed by patriarchal intelligence.

Representation of women in Lok Sabha 1952-2009

Election year	Male members of L.S	Female members of L.S	% of Female members
1952	477	22	4.41
1957	473	27	5.41
1962	469	34	6.72
1967	492	31	5.90
1971	499	22	4.22
1977	525	19	3.41
1980	516	28	5.2
1984	502	42	7.7
1989	490	27	5.22
1991	505	39	7.11
1996	504	40	7.31
1998	500	43	7.71
1999	494	49	9.2
2004	497	45	8.3
2009	485	59	10.8

(Source: <http://parliamentofindia.riic.in>)

References

- Vijaya Krishna,R.V, Pulla Rao. D and Jayanand Kumar.P. (2010) Policies and programmes in changing employment opportunities for women in school education . A case study of A.P, Education of Weaker section Ed.D.Pulla Rao,. A.P,House,New Delhi.
- Syamala Rao.G and Sanyasi rao.M(2010 .. Women empowerment through education, Education of weaker section Ed.D.P.Rap,A.P House, New Delhi.
- Rama Rao.J and Tirupathi Naidu.T (2010) Women empowerment through education ., Education of weaker section Ed. D.P.Rao, New Delhi.
- Divya Nigam(2008) Women Executives., HRM Review, the ICFAI Um.Press., Vol.VIII.No.IX.. /sep.08.
- Karuna Chanana (2007) Globalization, Higher education and gender, economics and political weekly,. Vol.XLII., No.8, Feb-07.
- Kathleen Patterson(2008), Myra Dingman and Davis M.R., Women in the work force., HRM Review., Icfaium press ., Vol.viii., issue ix.
- Ravindar Reddy,N., (2008)Women on the road to top., HRM Review., Icfaium.press Vol viii, issueix.
- Pramilla Kapoor (2006) Empowering the Indian Women., Pub.Div., Ministry of information and Broadcasting., GOI,New delhi.
- Sheetal Sharma(2008) Empowering women through education , strategy for sustainable rural development., KURUKSHETRA, vol.56.,No.3.Jan,08.
- Sheela.J (2011) A glimpse of women's entry into political life..' Political dimension of women empowerment' - Ed. D.Pulla rao,ASSO.Pub, Ambala City.
- Kaushik Susheela (1993).. ' Women's participation in politics'.. Vikas Pub..New Delhi.
- Sangeetha Purushottam (1998) The empowerment of women' in India- Grantors women's networks and the state., Sage Pub., New Delhi.
- Sai Sujatha,D and Dhana Lakshmi,K (2011) Women's Political participation challenges and strategies for empowerment., 'political' Dimension....? Ed.D.Pulla Rao.. ASSO Pub., Ambala City.
- Richard Martland (1994) women in parliament beyond numbers and IPU plan of action in 1994., Reports and documents No.22, Geneva.
- Karl Marilee (1995) Women and empowerment.. Participation and decision making , Zed Books Ltd., London.
- Sushma Sahay (1998) Women and Empowerment., Approaches and strategies., Discovery Pub.House., New Delhi.
- Lilly Grace B.E., And Purushottam.G (2011) How far empowerment of women attained in India.. Some Issues..' Political Dimension...' Ed.D.Pilla Rao, ASSOC.Publishers, Ambala City.