

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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**QUANDARIES OF INDIAN WOMEN DUE TO MISCONCEPTION REGARDING EMPOWERMENT CONCEPT**

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**RANDHEJA**

**ABSTRACT**

*Since centuries women have a unique and sacred position in the world and in our country, woman is considered as a symbol of love, respect, dedication, devotion, purity and source of inspiration. In today's era, when the whole world is on the path of paradigm shift, the Women's Empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century not only at national level but also at the international level. Various efforts are being done by the government as well as non government bodies at various levels and obviously the results seem also positive at a certain extent. Still there is no exaggeration to say that women empowerment is still an illusion or myth of the fact. Actually, the concept of women's empowerment has been somewhat misunderstood and this misconception leads women to have certain dilemma regarding their actual role and responsibilities towards family, society, community, nation and the world. I have highlighted some of the dilemmas taking shapes in women's mind and challenges which a woman faces in this so called developing 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**KEYWORDS**

Indian women, misconception of empowerment, women dignity, economic independence.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since centuries women have a unique and sacred position in the world and in our country, woman is considered as a symbol of love, respect, dedication, devotion, purity and source of inspiration. According to our ancient concept, a man and a woman are considered as two wheels of a cart. The cart can move fast and safely too, when both of them pull it in the same direction and with equal strength. This concept has been displayed through Ardhnarishwar in our history. This form of Shiva and Parvati explains the relation between man and woman. One cannot even imagine the existence of one without another. While commenting about women, Swami Vivekanand said, 'As a bird cannot fly on one wing, no society can make progress unless its women too join men in all activities.' Almost in all the societies of the world, the sphere of activities of women is no doubt larger and wider than that of men. The roles of women can be broadly classified as 'Breeder-Feeder and Producer'. The breeding of babies and feeding of humans of all ages is almost exclusively the work of women from the earliest and simplest hunting and gathering folk to the most industrialized and sophisticated society of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first two roles are assigned to women only and the third is divided between women and men. But women's production is normally noticed by statisticians when she leaves the home. Man's production is more apt to be noticed whether he leaves the home or not.<sup>1</sup> This is indeed a debatable issue when we talk of fair justice and equality of women in our social setup.

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT TODAY**

The phrase 'Women's Empowerment' is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being 'women'. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women must have the power to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms - a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage.<sup>2</sup>

The Constitution Framers were very much conscious of the problem of women empowerment. Hence they ensured that the Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. Moreover the Constitution also empowers the states to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of democratic polity, our laws, developmental policies, plans and programmes are aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions to secure rights of women. The women's movement and a widespread network of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) having strong grass-root presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. Women today are trying to understand their position and value in the society. Women have become increasingly aware of sexual inequalities in every sphere of life and are seeking ways to fight and to come out of them. The Indian women have started raising their voice against age old restraints, exploitations and dominations. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladders of social advancement with proud and dignity. Women of India are now uplifted and liberated and granted equal status with men in all walks of life-political, social, domestic and educational. They have secured various responsible positions in each and every field. No distinction is now made in matters of education between boys and girls. Their voice is now as forceful and important as that of men. They are becoming equal partners in making or dismissing of a government. Various laws have been amended in favour of women giving more benefits to them. Still there is no exaggeration to say that women empowerment is still an illusion or myth of the fact or reality.

**THE NAKED REALITY OF INDIA**

In spite of the various measures taken up by the government, the Women haven't been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in India occupying higher and shining positions in all the fields such as politics, administration, defence, corporate sector, health, education, space, and so on. But the naked fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, female foeticide, lower female literacy rate, domestic violence, deprivation, degradation and exploitation of women. Dr. Dashrath Bhuyan in his article titled "Empowerment of Indian Women : A challenge of 21st century" writes "Women are being brutalized, commoditized, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination."

**QUANDARIES AND MISCONCEPTIONS**

It seems that despite very important objectives thought over by great knowledgeable personalities and experts, the true achievement of goal remains a burning question. Actually, the concept of women's empowerment has been somewhat misunderstood by some of the programme-implementing bodies and others. Hence, this misconception leads women to have certain dilemma regarding their actual role and responsibilities towards family, society, community, nation and the world. Today women have started coming out of home and working for remuneration but some dilemma have started taking shapes in their mind. Such dilemmas are given words in this paper. I have tried to highlight some of the dilemmas taking shapes in women's mind and challenges which a woman faces in this so called developing 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- **EVALUATION OF WORK**

The so called developing and developed women are facing severe psychological crisis which in long run affect the family pattern, social setup and Indian cultural heritage. It is not wise decisions to start following all the programmes blindly without thinking of the darker sides of such issues. Women must think several times before accepting jobs. It is not a matter of imitating others. We must not aim at economical growth of a nation but the powerful foundation of our culture

too. Instead of underestimating the responsibilities of family and unpaid household work, women must raise their voice against such inequalities in valuation of work. No work is inferior in value, whether small or big in size and nature. Women should never think in the way that their household duties are inferior and carry no value. In actual sense, they are the backbones of the development of the country. When they work at home, bring up children with care and nurture elders with sympathy and love, then and then our life style is balanced. Otherwise there will be dangerous life-style disorder which will give birth to a self-centered society having no ethical base and cultural background.

In 'Women's Economic Contribution through Their Unpaid Household Work: The Case of India' (2009), Natasha Choudhary, Asuthosh Tripathy and Beena George have quantified and assigned an approximate economic value to the unpaid work performed by women throughout India. Assigning even a very low wage rate for those tasks yielded an annual figure for the value of women's unpaid household work of 61% of GDP. A typical Indian woman's day starts at about 5 a.m. and ends after 10 p.m. In addition to their unpaid household activities, women often spend six to eight hours per day on paid activities. This double burden left such women with little time for them-selves. Women in both rural and urban areas are far more involved in a range of domestic activities than men, regularly carrying out various tasks. Only a few husbands help their spouses in domestic tasks, which assistance seems to be very limited in its nature and extent. Most men and women both feel that household work is the responsibility of women.

Inequality of sex is observed due to patriarchal culture common in different degrees throughout the world. Women typically carry out most of the work involved in caring for the home and its residents, such work is given little or no social or economic importance, and as a result, women are perceived with little importance. While the work done by men is widely acknowledged and most men are considered as economically productive, women who are engaged in full-time household work are classified by the Government of India as economically unproductive. Yet the same tasks performed by these housewives, if done at another house, become a paid job and therefore valued.

#### ▪ EXPECTATIONS OF SOCIETY

Indian woman is always expected to be perfect in her domestic work and responsibilities irrespective of her role whether she is a house wife or an earning lady. In spite of her extraordinary intelligence and knowledge to be economic independent, she is naturally expected to have all the domestic responsibilities and burden. Even a working woman is expected to fulfil all the responsibilities towards her children, in-laws, parents and other family members. Her home must be tidy and she is expected to be good in domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, dusting, moping, washing clothes and vessels, ironing, nurturing children and elders, maintaining social relations, etc. She has to adjust herself in the social structure and environment. If a man lives alone, his home seems messy, unorganised and not descent. This is taken for granted. But is it so naturally accepted by the society in the case of a woman living alone? Certainly not. She has to complete all her domestic responsibilities first though she is a professional lady. She has to follow rituals and traditions of family and social set up. Here, the dilemma is whether to adjust in social structure or not.

#### ▪ IS WOMAN DOMINATED BY MAN ONLY?

Man and woman have been considered as inseparable partners of life. Nature itself has made them complementary to each other. But the fact is that whenever we talk about the situation of women, we mostly start blaming men and men dominating social setup. One must think about the true causes very neutrally. Although women are given equal opportunities; they still lag behind in availing them. Indian women suffer from social injustice rather than economic backwardness. Strong efforts must be done for women to avail her true dignity and position in the society. But what is the definition of true dignity? In majority of the family disputes, women are mentally or physically tortured by female family members. In some cases women are harassed by men with the consent of other female family members who enjoy seniority in family hierarchy. Women become victim of family/social politics prevailing in the society. In the issues such as dowry death, domestic violence and female foeticide, women are generally found tortured by other women of the family. Women are not divided by gender and class with men only but also within their own sex. Gender discrimination within the same gender also affects women's position and dignity in the society.

#### ▪ DIGNITY AS WOMEN

The story of Indian women is unique, as Indian society is trying to combine an ancient civilization with the progress of modern times. The situation of women can become worse than before, as they are overburdened and speechless due to misconception about empowerment. In greed of becoming powerful, she is inviting vulnerable condition for herself. This area of discussion is less focused, as all generally think in one direction i.e. economic freedom brings empowerment. Very few attempts are made to carve the powerful personality of women as women. We always try to imitate western culture blindly thinking it as superior to ours. Is it true in real sense? We have been failed to think critically the pros and cons of such blind imitation. Instead of trying to make a woman man, we must try to give value and dignity of women as women otherwise the whole Indian family system and prosperous cultural heritage will collapse. It does not mean that Indian woman should live with traditional ways and should not change but she must develop critical thinking about her-self and come out of the dilemma about her role as well as illusion of empowerment and must fight to have dignity and respect in its true sense.

It is strange that woman doesn't feel proud to be a woman. She feels proud to work and behave like a man. She tries to play roles of man and underestimate the value of self identity. Why should she behave in such manner? Actually women in our society are divided in two classes: Earning and non-earning. Unfortunately, earning women are considered as empowered while non-earning are unproductive and having inferior status in the society. Their unpaid hard work and sacrifice for family is given no weightage. We know that millions of hard-working Indian women are considered as economically unproductive and no more valuable than beggars and prisoners.

#### ▪ EDUCATION SYSTEM

True education enhances the inner capabilities of person and develops life skills. Ultimate aim of education is not only offering good jobs and positions but to develop virtues, morals and life skills. Education is not only for employment. Is it essential to utilize the knowledge for making money only? Women must become educated, as education is beneficial for them as well as their families. The family web is woven around the women. She has to be up to the mark and educated so that she could fend for herself and her family during the hour of crisis. The status of women would improve only if they educate themselves and grab every opportunity to become stronger and more powerful than before. Educated women are better able to care for their families and family finances, experience more opportunities in decision-making, and make better home managers. The Government of India should continue to increase efforts to educate the girl child. The educational curriculum should be restructured in order to emphasize gender equality rather than reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Sometimes women's value is measured from her earning capacity and market position. And so, she seems misguided in search of shining future and career building. Only monetary value of work is considered as a synonym of success and empowerment. Most of the academic curriculums and training programmes are designed in such a way to make women economically liberate and independent but the life-skill enhancing subjects such as family management, relationship management, children development, moral and ethical science, etc. remain untapped and untouched. It does not mean that women should not earn. But this perception must be changed that only earning women are empowered and respectable.

#### ▪ ECONOMICAL INDEPENDENCE AND EMPOWERMENT

Is it worth to measure the power of women with the parameters like economical liberation, political position and social status outside the home only? Can an economically dependent woman not be empowered at all? Whenever empowerment is talked of, we are used to think about earning capacity of a woman, her career, designation, and market position. Generally our thinking level is limited to such extent only. Obviously, now the Indian women have got opportunities to awake, arise and develop their versatile, individual personality. But what about their traditional expected role? One always thinks, writes and guides the women to acquire skills to improve the economic condition of the family. But here the question is that who will understand the actual condition and problems of women as 'women'. Can we imagine the situation, when all the women will start working outside home, who will perform all the domestic responsibilities? Who will take care of children and old parents and other family members? When we talk of empowerment, we must think about Indian family structure and system as a whole. We must not encourage selfish attitude ignoring the interest of family and community. Instead of making women a man, efforts must be planned to cultivate in a woman dignity as a powerful woman. She is gifted with natural talents, superb willpower, descent personality and cultured attitude. Then, why is she not respected with such virtues only? Sometimes it is observed that illiterate grandmother is more intelligent and full of common sense than her so called educated granddaughter.



**RESPECTED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Women should not look down upon domestic life. The main sphere of action for them who have not taken up jobs outside should be essentially a happy home which is their real kingdom and where their sweet manners and mature advices as wife, mother, sister and daughter make tremendous effects on the male members of the family. The progress of a nation depends upon the care and skill with which mothers rear up their children. It is a pious duty of a woman to bring forth noble generations of patriots, warriors, scholars and statesmen. Since child's education starts even in the womb and the impressions are formed in the mind of a child while in mother's arms, women have to play a role of vital importance. They have to feel and realise at every step of their life that they are builders of the fate of our nation since children grow mainly in mother's arms. They should also encourage and guide their husbands, children and other family members in taking right direction of life and should teach them the art of living by care and love. They should learn and develop the art of planning family budget and maintaining healthy standard of living full of satisfaction, mutual intimacy, trust, empathy, ethical values and virtues.

**ADOPTION OF CHANGE FROM BOTH THE SIDES**

Change is the law of nature and there is nothing wrong to adapt change even in the social family pattern. But such acceptance must be from both the sides- men and women. Today's woman is eager to change herself and accept the responsibilities of outer world too. But this one sided change will not bring empowerment for women. The social mindset must be broadened. Women empowerment is two way process not possible without active participation of men in the work area of women i.e. sharing domestic responsibilities and home management. The actual reality is that the whole productive work in world is clearly divided between two parties: men and women and such division of labour is well accepted and taken for granted. The mentality is that the work assigned and accepted by men is considered superior than women's. The fact is that such impression has been deep rooted in the mind and heart of all. Unless such mentality is changed and men start working with women, true empowerment and equality of women is not possible. When women are eager to accept economical and political responsibilities, the male counterpart should also be ready to accept additional responsibilities of home and family otherwise such situation will lead our nation towards life style disorder inviting many other serious problems.

**CONCLUSION**

In today's era, when the whole world is on the path of paradigm shift, the Women's Empowerment' has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century not only at national level but also at the international level. Indian society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no direct or indirect gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality and respect. When woman starts realizing the concept of empowerment and feels dignity and pride being a 'woman', then only the Vedic verse "Wherever Women is respected, God resides there" would come true.

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