

WOMEN-EMPOWERMENT, GENDER-EQUALITY, GENDER BASED LYNCHING AND SUSTAINABLE- DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT-

A sustainable and equal recovery for all is only possible if it is a feminist recovery. Women are idealized as strong, independent and powerful. They take part in almost in every field and profession. The participation of women can be seen in every sphere, i.e. sports, science and technology, education, politics, medicine, space etc. But still there are regions in the world where differences lie, say, as inequalities in income, work rights, sexual violence, gender discrimination in public spheres etc. Significant progress in society and communities are taking place around the world every day but still bigger work is to be done on the path of gender equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender. Women and men play a vital role in the creation and development of a successful and efficient society. A fair balance between the two is necessary. But because of the biological and physical differences between men and women, gender inequality is often treated as natural in some societies. However, despite appearances, scholars have shown that the inequalities between men and women are social rather than natural. For example, there are no biological reasons that can explain why so few women are found in positions of public power nor can nature explain why women generally receive a smaller or no share in family property in most societies. It is the 'few mentality' in the society that creates the inequalities. Violence based on women seems to be a common thing. The present world especially India has seen, incidents of lynching based on gender. United Nations sustainable development and its goals can never be achieved without women empowerment and gender equality in the world. It is not that sustainable development is possible through a war between men and women; rather an endeavor should be there to understand the reality and bring change. The research paper looks at the concept of 'empowerment of women', 'gender equality', 'gender-based lynching' and 'sustainable development' and the ways of achieving it. What do the terms mean? The situation of India is to be taken into consideration. The four elements is a step towards the progress of a civilization and it is necessary to understand each of them.

Keywords: women empowerment, gender-based lynching, sustainable development, gender equality.

Introduction

Today, women are idealized as strong, independent and powerful. They take part in almost every field and profession, The participation of women can be seen in every sphere, i.e. in sports, science and technology, education, politics, medicine, space etc. But still there are regions in the world where the differences lie, say, as inequalities in income, work rights, sexual violence, and gender discrimination in public spheres (SDG2015, Goal 5, UNDP). The dark side of it cannot be ignored. Women play various roles in their lifetime ranging from a mother to that of a breadwinner but are almost subordinated to male authority; largely excluded from high status occupation and decision making both at work and at home. Paradoxically, in Indian society where women goddesses are worshipped, women are denied an independent identity, status and equality. Besides, gender-based violence also plays a crucial role in such a situation.

Adapting the principles of gender equality through the empowerment of women, there can be a change in those discrepancies. Society needs to understand that it is in the best of its interest that women need to be empowered and treated equally so that every section of the community goes hand in hand for a better future.

International arena already started providing level playing field for women. **United Nations Global Impact** and **United Nations Women** established seven **Women Empowerment Principles (WEP)** as a tool for delivery of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 agenda and gender-equality. Some of them include-equal pay for work of equal value, gender-responsive supply chain practices, and zero tolerance against sexual harassment in the workplace. By joining the WEP community, the CEOs of the companies conform to the agenda (WEPs, UN WOMEN, and United Nations Global Impact)¹. But before discussing gender equality it is important to understand empowerment.

Women empowerment

Empowerment means giving power, control, and authority for performing acts, becoming self-reliant, confident, and realization of one's rights. "Women's empowerment" is a process of increase in the entry of women, to take their own life decisions and realize their capabilities without any boundaries. Women's empowerment entails three key essentials namely- 'power', 'autonomy', and 'subjectivity'². Though significant progress in society and communities are taking place around the world every day, still bigger work is to be done on the path of gender equality and non-discrimination. Empowering women is the tool to achieve good education, economic growth, political stability, and social transformation in society, states, and nations. Women can be empowered and progressed in the following fields and ways:

Education- Education is the key to realize gender neutrality. Without proper education, both men and women do not stand on equal footing. Education is the key to growing and developing a community, which is still lacking in several under-developed and developing

countries, concerning young girls. Education bring human conscience and provide equality of gender i.e. male/female/transgender. Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures is to be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning.

Economic- Women's participation in the economy makes the means of production more effective and produces efficient results in a country. This bridges the gap between men and women. Although women today are strong contributors to the economy of the world, but still in some states gender- equality is a myth. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved for sustainable development in the following ways -by placing women as leaders and giving them decision-making roles, creating more job opportunities for women, investing in women's entrepreneurial ideas, taking action against unpaid labor work, and mentoring women professionally and personally³.

Political- Having political involvement of women allows women to raise their voices towards a new policy implementation in the community and country.

Social- Empowerment of women in the society and social relations as opposed to all disabilities and gender-discrimination paves the way to achieve social empowerment of women.

Domestic and health- All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance to be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and effective action against perpetrators of such violence. Special emphasis to be laid on programs and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services should be adopted and special attention will be given to the needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a priority concern. Measures should be adopted relating to the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise informed choices, their vulnerability to sexual and health problems. Taking this view equality of gender need to be focused to achieve women empowerment.

Gender Equality

Because of the biological and physical differences between men and women, gender inequality is often treated as natural in some societies. However, despite appearances, scholars have shown that the inequalities between men and women are social rather than

natural. For example, there are no biological reasons that can explain why so few women are found in positions of public power nor can nature explain why women generally receive a smaller or no share in family property in most societies. Thus, it is the ‘few mentality’ in the society that creates the inequalities.

Gender Inequality is necessary to be understood. It is a social process in which people are treated differently and disadvantageously under similar circumstances based on gender. (The Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science & Medicine, 3 ed.)⁴. Women and girls are the victims of gender inequality every now and then. Inequalities in terms of sex and gender are not only against basic human rights but also against the peaceful and sustainable development of the world.

Achieving gender equality and empowering all girls and women is one of the United Nations Sustainable development goals, 2030 to be achieved. (UN, 2015, SDGs, goal5). For this, it is essential to remove all types of malpractices like- sex trafficking, femicide, wartime sexual violence, gender gap etc. from the world⁵. Oppression of women is indeed based on irrational prejudices against women. (The Book of the City of Ladies, 1405, Christine de Pizan).

To promote gender equality in the world, UNICEF, came up with Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, which commences, the UNICEF Gender Policy, 2021–2030, to accelerate gender equality, non-discrimination, and women empowerment in the workplaces and in its programs. Thus work is carried on in the path of gender equality in international organizations as well.

Gender based lynching

The term "Mob violence" has been derived from two words 'mob' meaning ‘group of people’ with the intention of causing trouble or violence in the society, and 'lynching' indicate ‘extra judicial killing’ by the group. When such group caused violence on women due to her gender, it becomes a gender based violence or lynching. It is a form of violence in which a mob in the pretext of administration of justice without trial executes a presumed offender inflicting often torture and corporal mutilation. In these acts of violence, the mob holds the trial and imposes the punishment and sentence on women based on the laws formed by mob which are inspired by religion, tradition and custom, without any legal trial. In certain circumstances these trials does not happen and the mob starts the execution of punishments based on certain presumptions and stereotypes.

Lynching against women in India

Mob- violence has been in practice ever since early times in several countries as many famous mob-trials been described by historians. In India these incidents dates back from the early ancient Hindu customs of ‘sati’, which symbolized closure to marriage. However, it was a voluntary act, in which, as a sign of being a dutiful wife, a woman followed her husband to the afterlife. With time, it became a forced practice. Women who did not wish to die, were forced to do so in different ways and were pressurized to accept sati. Various accounts tell us

about different ways in which the ritual of sati was carried out. Most accounts either describe women seated on their husbands' funeral pyre or lying down next to dead-body, others would jump or walk into the pyre after it had been lit. Such practice varied from region to region.

One of the most important causes of lynching against women is the 'presumed witchcraft' In the 21st century, still today killing of women by people on the pretext of witchcraft is considered normal in many rural areas of the country.

Sustainable development and Goals

Sustainable development is a guide or an idea in bringing an end to social and ecological problems in the world, for a better future. The concept was globally recorded in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development i.e. "Brundtland Commission". Its blueprint can be found in the professional terminology of forestry. 'Sustained yield' had been the major doctrine of international forestry for almost two centuries. This formula is a translation of the German term 'nachhaltiger Ertrag'⁶.

In September 2015, United Nations adopted the **sustainable development goals (SDGs)**, taking various social, economic, ecological issues at hand. Around 193 nations of the world came forward and took a long-term plan to tackle the problems of the planet by adopting 17 sustainable development goals to achieve sustainable development for the future by 2030. In relation to women, Sustainable development goal-5, emphasized on gender equality and empowerment of women and minor females. Accordingly **SDG-5**, provide around nine targets and fourteen indicators to achieve the goal.

Some of the targets include- ending all forms of discrimination against females, violence, and exploitation of females, eliminating practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages, increasing the value of unpaid care and promoting shared domestic responsibilities, etc. And few other indicators are- legal frameworks for gender equality and non-discrimination, violence against women from an intimate partner, women married before age 15 or 18, etc.⁷. The assertion is that sustainable development through their goals can only be achieved by bringing in women or girls, not as receivers of benefits or rights, but by making them "agents of change", with the inclusion of absolute women participation in all spheres.

Situation in India

UN sustainable development and its goals can never be achieved without women's empowerment and gender equality in the world, particularly in under-developed and developing countries like India. According to a report by the Government of India, National Commission for Women, (NCW) in the year 2020, total complaints of women-related offenses, recorded 23722. (Include- acid attacks, bigamy, cybercrime against women, dowry death, etc.)⁸, shows that the matter is a great concern for India.

India has still a long way to go to achieve the target of women empowerment and gender equality. India's journey for women empowerment and gender inequality began long back. Women's empowerment and equality in ancient and medieval India cannot be said to be the absolute one, with proof. But it is undeniable that steps are already been taken towards it. The response of women movements towards it is remarkable too.

Women response

The roots of the Indian women's movement go back to the 19th century male social reformers who took up issues concerning women and started women's organizations. Women started forming their own organization from the end of the nineteenth century first at the local and then at the national level. In the years before independence, the two main issues they took up were political rights and reform of personal laws. Women's participation in the freedom struggle broadened the base of the women's movement. In post-independence India, large number of women's autonomous groups has sprung up challenging patriarchy and taking up a variety of issues such as violence against women, greater share for women in political decision making, etc. both at the activist and academic level.

Pre-independence era

The roots of the Indian women's movement go back to the early 19th century when social reformers, beginning with Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), began to focus on issues concerning women. Following them, various Indian social reform movements begun improving the condition of women. Women's Organizations started by men who belonged to the socio religious reform associations began the first organization for women. Some of them are as follows: Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Prathana Samaj etc.

Freedom struggle era

The involvement of a really large number of women in the national movement of India began when Gandhi launched the first *Non-Cooperation Movement* and gave a special role to women. Peasant women played an important role in the *rural satyagrahas* of Borsad and Bardoli. Women even participated in the *Salt satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement* and in all the *Gandhian satyagrahas*.

Women organizations such as *National Federation of Indian Women (1954) and the Samajwadi Mahila Sabha (1959)* were formed to work for supporting the cause of Indian women. Resurgence of Women's Movements also began in the late 70s. *Anti-dowry Movements, Anti-rape Movement* is remarkable in this context.

Post-independence era

In post-independent period, a series of institutional initiatives have been introduced for the emancipation of women in the society. The most important of these pertain to the constitutional provisions and social legislation for women and planned economic development. Women's movement has been widely influenced by these broad socio-economic and political processes of this period.

Modern era

Over the years the planning strategies (line of action) for women from *1st five year plan to 12th five year plan* have shifted from welfare to development and to empowerment of women. Indian legislation too has enacted various laws for the protection and empowerment of women in society. *Articles 14, 15, and 16*, of the constitution of India, clearly speaks of equality before the law, making specific provisions and equality in job opportunities for women. *Directives principles of state policy(DPSP)* of the Indian constitution provide for equal pay and livelihood for the women, by the state. Besides, *The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986), the protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013*, etc. are some of the noteworthy legislation, in this regard⁹. Judiciary too contributed well so that the right and justice of the women should not be defeated.

There are several landmark cases, say, as *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan, A.P. v. P.B. Vijayakumar, Gurupad Khandappa Magdum v Hirabai Khandappa Magdum, State v. Ram Singh and others (Nirbhaya Rape Case), Joseph Shine v Union of India*, etc. which seeks to provide guidance and sensitize the problem in the society. Various schemes such as *Beti Bachao Beti padhao, Pradhan Mantri ujjwala yojana, Working women hostel, Women helpline*, etc. were launched by the Government for the safety and equality of the women. It is to be agreed that, work is being carried on towards the complete empowerment of women in achieving the sustainable development and their agenda goals. But, the challenge that exists is, that despite legislation, precedents, and legal tools, their effective execution and successful justice are not there. The malpractices regarding women's right in every sphere can still be seen. Women empowerment and gender equality are comparatively less in rural areas than in urban areas in the country. As per the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 published by the World Economic Forum, India is ranked 140 out of 156 countries with a score of 0.625,(out of 1)¹⁰, which shows India has still to work hard in this field.

Conclusion/Suggestions

Women and men play a vital role in the creation and development of a successful and efficient society. In the step toward gender justice and a gender-equal world, women's empowerment should be emphasized and stressed. It is not that sustainable development is possible through a war between men and women; rather an endeavor should be there to understand the reality and bring change. Reforms by states, international organizations, and world bodies, are there, and will be there in the future, but the need of the moment is, citizen-reforms, to be adopted at a grounded or societal level for effective all-round development. The sustainable development of the world is only possible by taking the empowerment of women and gender equality, into consideration, together with the elimination of violence against women. There is an interlinking between sustainable development, women empowerment and gender equality, towards anti-gender-based lynching.

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