

## **Module-16**

# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**



**Developed by:**

**Dr. Subrata Chatterjee**  
**Associate Professor of Sociology**  
**Khejuri College**  
**P.O- Baratala, Purba Medinipur**  
**West Bengal, India**

# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

## **NOTION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

‘EMPOWERMENT’ MAY be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them.<sup>1</sup> Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the following factors in its definition of women empowerment: • Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed. • Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life. Batliwala (1974) defines empowerment as “the process of challenging existing power relation and of gaining greater control over the source of power”.

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights

## **EMPOWERED WOMEN’S CHARACTERISTICS**

- (i) Empowered women define their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern industrial societies.
- (ii) Empowered women maintain equal mindedness. They act out roles that challenge male dominance. They respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good.
- (iii) Empowered women use their talent to live fulfilling lives. They not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.
- (iv) Empowered women maintain their strength on the face of pressures from the religion and work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women.

- (v) Empowered women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves, they do not derive their sense of being from male authorities nor do they live vicariously through men.

### **Dimensions and Parameters of Women Empowerment**

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

- (i) The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;
- (ii) The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;
- (iii) The economic component requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;
- (iv) The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change; and
- (v) There is a physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

### **The parameters of women empowerment are**

- Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
- Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.
- Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.
- Building a positive image of women in the society and recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
- Developing ability among women to think critically.
- Fostering decision-making and collective action.
- Enabling women to make informed choices.

- Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.
- Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.

## **Women Empowerment in India**

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974- 78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. India has also ratified various International conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The Cairo conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society— political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in 2001

## **Women Empowerment Policy 2001 Goal and Objectives**

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include: (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realise their full potential. (ii) The de jure and de facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres— political, economic, social, cultural and civil. (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation. (iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc. (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

(vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women. (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

### **The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)**

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the Government for women under aegis of various Central Ministries. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programmes for women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority.

### **High Level Committee on the Status of Women**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India on February 27, 2012 approved the setting up of a High Level Committee on the status of women to undertake another comprehensive study to understand the status of women as well as to evolve appropriate policy interventions based on a contemporary assessment of women's needs. Although institutional mechanism for women empowerment is quite prominent in India yet situation of state of empowerment in India can be taken from analysis of following trends: In order to analyze the state of women in a country various methods were designed from time-to-time. The introduction in 1995 of the Gender related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) coincided with growing international recognition of the importance of monitoring progress in the elimination of gender gaps in all aspects of life. While the GDI and the GEM have contributed immensely to the gender debate, they have conceptual and methodological limitations. Therefore the Gender Inequality Index was introduced as an experimental index in 2010 as part of the 20th anniversary edition of the Human Development Report.