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## A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE TO UNDERSTAND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN'S LIVES

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### **Abstract**

Empowerment is a process that is both individual as well as group oriented, since it is through involvement in groups that people most often believe to develop their awareness and the ability to organize and take action to bring about change, often leading to improved decision making capacity at home and at the community level, and greater participation in politics. In the process, empowerment will help women make better use of their talents to lead better lives. They do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equal and cooperate in order to work towards the common goal. It is therefore a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. The process of women's empowerment should be critically linked to the issue of sustainability of their own livelihoods. If and only if a woman's livelihood is ensured in a sustainable manner, would she be a willing stakeholder towards her empowerment. Women's empowerment needs to be both realized as well as assessed are social, political and economic. Women's empowerment and women's education faces a number of social, cultural, economic and psychological barriers which has been highlighted through this paper.

**Key words:** Gender discrimination, sustainability, education, women empowerment.

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### **Introduction:**

Empowerment is a very positive concept with the capacity for self-action and the subsequent transformation of the self, the environs or of society at large. It is inextricably linked to both the ability and opportunity to make decisions and to act for one's own self. Thus empowerment of the weak and the backward is egalitarian in nature, stressing the competence and right of people to take charge of their own destinies. For the powerless, this entails a bottom up process whereby they transform from passive or reactive subjects to positive actors

in the drama of their individual lives. The concept too is dynamic, since change is a constant phenomenon in life.

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### **Understanding women empowerment with respect to woman's livelihood in a sustainable manner: A Strategic View**

The process of women's empowerment should be critically linked to the issue of sustainability of their own livelihoods. If and only if a woman's livelihood is ensured in a sustainable manner, would she be a willing stakeholder towards her empowerment. However this is a chicken and egg problem, since livelihood sustenance comes only with her empowerment. So policy and grassroots action should take into cognizance the value of developing and promoting self-help groups for women's empowerment and her development. It is with economic independence that the Indian women can be on the road to social change. The need of the hour is to empower women as India's development is intrinsically linked to the social, economic and political empowerment of every discrimination is the key to real empowerment and this empowerment has to be brought about through a bottom up approach led by the community's proactive participation.

Women's empowerment needs to be both realized as well as assessed are social, political and economic. Women's education faces a number of social, cultural, economic and psychological barriers. Societal expectations reflect a traditional bias, where the ideal women being one who is loyal, faithful, passive, submissive, self-effacing and self-sacrificing. Increasing malnutrition and repeated pregnancies may make her life expendable; nevertheless she would have fulfilled her main role of bearing children, preferably sons. This social argument is reinforced by the general lack of employable skills in women, on account of their low literacy and lack of training. Further, misinterpretation of religion and cultural often tend to depress women's status and role. The resultant low self- image is so internalized as to inhibit any self-motivation for learning on the part of most women. Also, in conditions of poverty, the poor cannot see how sending their daughters to school can change their existential reality. Even when girls enroll in school, the scheme of education seems to reinforce their subordination. The existing system of education thus reproduces not only the social class power structure but also the prevailing gender disparities.

To promote women empowerment women's education should aim at economic independence and self-reliance. Their education should be in a positive direction through which women achieve self- respect and self-confidence. Though protective legislation is in place to protect women from being brutalized or sexually exploited at work places, the danger also prevails on their way to work places or from field inspections, etc. Also, educational institutions should provide special opportunities for those women who for some reason or the other could not pursue their education and had to drop out, but are willing to continue their course of study after a break. On the whole women's education should be directed at the development of personality, economic independence and self-occupations, and in greater spheres of influences.

### **Impact of Education in Women Empowerment:**

A variety of socioeconomic factors are responsible for women's lower educational attainment, including direct costs, the need for female labor, the low expected returns, and social restrictions. Education helps reducing child marriage, infant mortality rate and also minimizing the risk of female mortality during childbirth. In recently, *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is an initiative taken by the Govt. of West Bengal to improve the life and the status of the girls helping economically backward families with cash so that families do not arrange the marriage of their girl child before eighteen years because of economic problem. The purpose of this initiative is to uplift those girls who are from poor families and thus can't pursue higher studies due to tough economic conditions. It has been given international recognition by United Kingdom's Department of International Development and the UNICEF. Education is also inversely proportional to the chances of falling prey to the exploitative forces. Finally education will lead to greater participation of women in various community led activities and better entrepreneurial opportunities, and realize the goal of achieving economic independence, a vital cog in the wheel of women's empowerment, and thereby to social change. In this regard it is worth mentioning the new role of UGC in introducing the Extension Approach in the university system, which is to extend educational opportunities to those who have not been able to attend institutes of higher learning, to render services to different sections of society.

Again illiteracy and are closely linked. Illiteracy among women belonging to the lower socio-economic group is higher, which is mainly due to induction into labor force at school going ages to supplement family income. Literacy opens the possibility of unlimited exposure to new information and more importantly, to new ways of thinking and new perspectives of existing information. It helps women to be constructively able to express their talents and give direction to constructively able to express their talents and give direction to their aptitudes. It leads to better hygiene, improved nutritional practices, better mother and child health, etc. caring for family health with timely medical intervention. Also helps establishing a linkage by making an informed choice in birth control. It can be mentioned that the key to economy squarely rests, at least in the Indian context, on achieving some control over population growth. Education to the women and merely female literacy is a crucial step towards realization of this goal.

### **Factors Influencing Gender Discrimination:**

#### ➤ ***Social Factors***

***Patriarchal Society:*** Most of the country has strong patriarchal custom, where men hold authority over female family members and inherit property & this custom where inheritance passes from father to son.

***In Decision Making:*** Women have less authority than men to legal recognition and protection, as well as lower access to public knowledge and information, and less decision-making power both within and outside the home. This is also one of the reasons for inequality in gender.

***Education:*** The female literacy rate of developed country are satisfied while ranking position developing and under develop country not good.

Gender-based violence: Gender-based violence such as rape, sexual assault, insult to modesty, kidnapping, abduction, cruelty by intimate partner or relatives, importation or trafficking of girls, persecution for dowry, indecency and all other crimes are practiced on women.

Health: Gender discrimination between women's and men's life expectancy and women live compared to men in good health because of lots of violence, disease, or other relevant factors.

Dowry: The dowry system in our society also contributes to gender discrimination by influencing the perception that girls are a burden on families.

#### ➤ **Cultural Factors**

Religious practice: Religious rituals, which can only be performed by males for their parents' afterlife. Sons are often the only person entitled to performing funeral rights for their parents.

Old age support: Another factor which driving gender inequality is the preference for sons, as they are deemed more useful than girls. They are supposed to support the old age security of their parents.

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Son Preference: In our male dominant, boys are given the exclusive rights to inherit the family name and properties and they are viewed as additional status for their family.

#### ➤ **Economic Factors**

Labor participation: There is wage inequality between man and woman in workplace. A substantial number of women enter the labor market after thirties, generally after completion of their reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing.

Access to credit: There are large disparities between men and women in terms of status and access to work place.

Property Rights: Although women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, while, women are at a disadvantage in their practical life.

Employment inequality: Some common inequalities which also take place in the workplace are the gender-based imbalances of individuals in power and command over the management of the organization. Women are not able to move up into higher paid positions quickly as compared to men.

#### **Conclusion:**

Empowerment entails struggle; learning to deal with the forces of oppression; entails having a vision of new society, with a conscious and deliberate intervention and effort to enhance the quality of life. Economic empowerment focuses on improving women's control over material resources thereby strengthening their economic security. It also requires transfer of skills of management and control of the economic activities to the women's groups so as to enable them to feel confident and empowered. From the women's empowerment perspective; it's imperative that women's economic activities are viable. This can be successfully done by

providing training and capacity building assistance to the women's self-help groups, developing them into operational units producing goods and services that can cater to the local market in an economically meaningful manner, thereby the capacities and competencies of the poor and underprivileged women can be enhanced to cope with the existing market system, and ultimately fulfill the attainment of the social change. With women slowly gaining control and being involved in the decision making process, and as members of the society, real empowerment will emerge and a change in women's status will certainly take place.

Once economic empowerment is achieved, it will have major implications on the overall empowerment of women. Intra-family relationships and domestic work culture may change dramatically, resulting in social empowerment. A more equitable participation of women in decisions concerning the family leadership and active participation at the community level will improve political acumen and eventually help in successful political empowerment. Political empowerment will, in turn, result in more representative planning for women and a strengthening and sustaining of the process of overall empowerment of women.

Women take care of the basic needs of society like food, fuel, fodder and shelter and nurturing, and as such they are more in tune with nature. History has shown repeatedly that women have led peace and ecology movements in the world as well as in India. So sustainable development has to include women, if not be women centric altogether. To effectively implement the agenda for women's equality and empowerment it is imperative to create a strong and result oriented institutional structure at the national and international level, provide the needed financial support system. It is also believed that empowerment will lead us our search for a world free of violence and war.

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