



Withering Women: A Shift from Endowment to Empowerment

Dr. Smita Naik

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Preface Women, who constitute almost half of the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of all working hours, receives one tenth of world's income and own less than 1 percent of world's property are identified as most vulnerable subaltern group. The subordinate status of women as second fiddle to their male counterpart has been legitimized in the psycho-socio-economic-cultural domain/tradition. Women, cutting across caste, class, wellbeing and culture are denied of their own ontology/autonomy, being and becoming, a clear image or self esteem. Back home, in India the position of women in just as an image of domestic doulas, a prisoner of the comfortable concentration camp. The Indian women suffer from lack of self and space, disempowerment, disprivilege, disadvantage, sexist discrimination, gender inequality, invisibility, asymmetries and marginalization. Despite of the principles of gender equality being enshrined in our constitution and despite the state being empowered to adopt measure of positive discrimination in favour of women, still in India they continue to bear the brunt of societal discrimination. If we look at any development parameters say it is health, education, employment, mortality rate; we find the women in India are on very weak footing. The low social status of women in India is clearly visible from global Human Development Index, which ranks India as 118 among 177 nations on gender equality. To address the issue of gender inequality and for attainment of a gender just society, 'empowerment of women' appeared to be significant social and political developments of 20th century, marked a turning point in the history of unequal gender relations, paving the way for a major civilizational transformation. Today, in 21st century the concept of empowerment of women has become central to every development received wide acclamation in the 4th World conference on women held in Beijing in 1995, which observed that "women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power, are fundamental for the advancement of equality, development and peace." However, the campaign for women empowerment became foremost feminist agenda since mid 1980s. The concept of 'women empowerment', as looked by Prof. Amartya Sen, is a process by which a woman is ensured with access and choice. It is a process of equipping the women with power, opportunities to assert for her rights and identity in the society. It is against the practice of segregation and subjugation of women and makes an advocacy or the integration of women and identity formation by the women in the local, national and the global forum. However, the entire process of women's journey from endowment to empowerment, the picture looks quite gloomy, as if their century's long struggle finds them in withering away position. To achieve genuine empowerment, women of India have to swim upstream so as to be able to defeat the traditional forces of logo centrism of the norm-based society. This edited volume is concerned with issues pertaining to gender inequality and women empowerment. One of the most urgent challenges now facing human kind is to halt and reverse the growing deterioration in the gender relations that has augmented social disharmony and imbalances. Every country, large and small irrespective of its richness and culture is confronted with this basic human question of gender equality and gender justice. With the emergence of globalization, with free market economy, gender issues effecting status of women and their empowerment question has taken a changed dimension attracting research concern and scholarly attention. Since many issues and current developments concerning status of women are now in the history of gender relations, more research is needed to unfold the myth and reality.

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