SOCIO–CULTURAL IMPEDIMENTS & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: *India is a large country with vast socio-cultural diversity in its varied regions. The development issues related to women in a large country like India will not only be inappropriate but sometimes even misleading. Women specific and women related legislations have been enacted to safeguard the rights and interest of women, besides protecting against discrimination, violence, and atrocities and also to prevent socially undesirable practices. Gender injustice towards women in societies is the basic reason for deprivation of women from expanding their abilities to make strategic life choices. Even today, we can find female oppression in many societies ranging from tacit male dominance in religion and philosophies to the brutal male oppression. This, gender injustice to woman, again restricts the achievement of development, peace and freedom resulting as a major contributor to global poverty – in both the economic and human definitions of the term. The study underlines the socio-cultural obstacles to women's empowerment and to examine the effect of socio- cultural factors on women .The article argued that the socio-cultural values and norms have a strong influence on the issue of women discriminations. There are various forms of socio-cultural practice that create discrimination between men and women in the society.*

Key Words: *Patriarchal, Women discrimination, women empowerment, socio-cultural.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

India is a patriarchal and patrilineal society. Patriarchy can be defined as the "rule of the father" but in social terms, refers to the system of male dominance i.e. where children name is traced through the father; where the ownership, control and inheritance of all assets are in the hands of men. Due to patriarchal ideology and socio-cultural practice parents give priority on son in every aspect. These cultural and social norms create a situation where women and girls are discriminated. Women are usually restricted to household duties and are not the "providers" of the household needs. Due to biological differences women are discriminated by the society of being female. The domineering male factor and stereotypes emanating there from, the female genital mutilations, societal assigned gender roles as well as the boy child preferences over the girl child on matters education are some of the major obstacles standing on the way of women empowerment.

1.1 WOMEN DISCRIMINATION

Women discrimination can be considered as unequal treatment of a person based on solely on that person sex. Discrimination against women has been an ongoing concern for the past years. It hasn't been resolved up to the present times. In many societies, especially in the patriarchal societies, men are considered as the authority of the family. Women's role is only for bearing child and housekeeping. "Gender discrimination against women in the market place reduces the available talent in an economy, which has negative economic consequences. Gender discrimination takes many forms. Many socio-cultural practices seen as normal from a religious or cultural point of view have women out of the mainstream (Berta Esteve – Volart, 2004).

1.2 EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a process of improving the capacity of individuals or groups through expansion of assets and capabilities. It is "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 2001)." Being empowered individuals will have their freedom to choose these capabilities in pursuit of better influencing the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them. Empowerment encompasses all issues pertaining to the economic, social and cultural in a society, and varies in respect of time, place and social affiliation.

Empowerment is the power within to articulate, power to develop skills, power with which collective action is made possible and the power over changing underlying inequalities. It is the social, political, economic and spiritual strength of an individual, the confidence in developing her capabilities and the realization that power can change.

1.3 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women are the builder and molder of the nation's destiny. Women empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision – making power and control and to

transformative action. It is increasing self-reliance of poor people and especially poor women. It means that the women live their own life in a way that they think appropriate on the basis of their condition of family circumstances, qualities and capabilities of which they themselves are the best judges. The process of empowerment enables them to realize the full potential and empower them in all spheres of life.

"Empowerment of women means reorganization of power in favor of women. It is the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is a transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. Women empowerment means empowering women socially, economically and politically so that they can break away from male domination and claim equality with them. (Avasthi and Srivastava, 2001)." Thus women's empowerment refers to the process of improving gender equality through developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge the power relation.

1.4 SOCIO–CULTURAL ASPECTS OF EMPOWERMENT

Socio-cultural factors are things that can affect our lifestyles as a society. They can have an influence on individual behaviors depending on one's social values. Some of them could be religion, economic status, education, family, politics, cultural values etc. They are the facts and experiences that influence individuals' personality, attitudes and lifestyle. Socio- cultural factors involve both social and cultural elements of the society. Age, education, caste, religion, marital status, family income, housing conditions etc. are some of the important variables that affect women in their empowerment and development.

Socio-cultural factors are deeply rooted elements of a particular society and encompass the values, attitudes, norms, practices, institutions, stratifications, and related ways of a society. Socio-cultural empowerment of women include the base of gender inequality, sex ratios, life expectancy rates and fertility rates which shows the general status of women in terms literacy, economic growth, availability of health care and birth control facilities, educational status of women, age at marriage, literacy rates and participation of women outside the home.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ali et al. (2010) discussed the cultural barriers to women empowerment. The cultural factors restrained women empowerment and were due to male dominated family systems where females are not allowed to receive education or take part in family related matters.

Smith's (2008) view that women face patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the hands of males is evident.

Malhotra (2005) describe "the term empowerment as a process by which women obtains larger command over intellectual and material resources, which help them to raise their self-dependence and increase them to laid stress on their rights and dare the philosophy of patriarchy and the gender based prejudice against women."

Mason and Smith (2003) stated that women's empowerment absolutely imposes that in all human societies the men commands women, or to be further specific, males control at least small segment of the women of their societal strata, especially of their families and households.

Boender et al (2002) said that "Women make up half of the world's population, and form a cross-cutting group that overlaps all other groups in society. Compared to other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups, the household and family relations play a central part in women's disempowerment".

Jehan (2000) states that impediments on women strengthening start from social practices and convictions. Patriarchal based control is legitimized and practiced on the premise of society, a composite of custom, and religion which decides and characterizes the endorsed part of women in the public arena, their versatility and their admission to financial assets, social and political power too.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of this study is-
- To examine various socio-cultural impediments that exists in women's empowerment and gender development.
- To suggest different remedial measures for strengthening the socio- cultural empowerment of women.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The prepared paper is a **Descriptive study** in nature based on **Secondary data** and information .The secondary information have been collected from different "scholars and researchers" published books, articles published in different journals, periodicals, conference paper, working paper and websites on Internet .

5. FINDINGS:

Women's discriminations are reinforced by various socio-cultural norms which creates women's discrimination in the household. Socially, there is a belief that women are made to do household chores and

Culturally, a belief that women are supposed to be led but not to lead. Due to cultural practice, from a very young age girls learn domestic skills and begin to take on domestic duties, such as cooking, sewing, washing, cleaning, and child caring and supplementing the household income with cottage crafts. In rural areas, it is a strong belief that a son should be educated because, unlike a daughter who after her marriage serves another family, a son will need to support his aged parents. For such beliefs, most families prepare girls for marriage and girls are taught to be obedient and quiet, to respect the leading roles played by males and to take on the responsibility for bearing and rearing children, and this responsibility not only hinders them in attending school but also precludes them from external jobs. Daughter disadvantage may be due in the part of social norms that daughters move away from their parents upon marriage. Therefore, daughters are considered as the non-permanent member of the family while sons are considered as the asset of the family. Thus, the most significant impact upon women empowerment is of entrenched socio-cultural beliefs. The old traditions and practices have entered the mindset of people. It has been preserved, although such approach implies that Indian society has not changed and cannot be changed.

There are several factors that hinder the empowerment of women is:
- Rigid mindsets with respect to gender roles and expectations. One of the contributory factors to this is that these areas don't have as much access to outward influence as urban areas.
- Weak penetration of education. Though, India has achieved a near universal primary enrolment, but retention levels are weak. Also enrolment in higher education is dismal. Illiterate women are more vulnerable to all kinds of abuse.
- Caste identities are strictly adhered to in rural areas which make it difficult for all, especially women to cross their self and society imposed limitations.
- Men outnumber women as voters and hence issues of men get a preference in electoral promises.

Women themselves are biggest perpetrators of violence against themselves. Patriarchy is so deep rooted that they manifest notions such as, 'the good woman' and 'the good wife'. It is partly these stereotypes that lead to extreme reactions towards women, who choose to challenge these norms. These norms also force women into towing the line of labor being. The best way of eliminating such social pressures is by increasing awareness among men, to compel their wives and daughters to rise above such stereotypes and live their lives independent of such notions.

The following are the suggestions for strengthening the socio- cultural empowerment of women in the Indian society:
- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- 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.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The empowerment of women is understood as the core issue for shaping the status of women. Among the socially underprivileged groups, the women are prey of gender prejudice and denial. There is still a long way to go to make sure complete gender equality despite of the development in executing women's empowered and gender sameness programs in national plan. The efforts for eradicating discrimination and deprivation should base on gender equality; otherwise it will cease to bear any fruit and would be detrimental for family as well as for the whole society. Socio-cultural Empowermset and gender equality are rudiments in achieving sustainable political and economic security within all individuals.

6. CONCLUSION:
The study concludes that women are discriminated in family material goods. They are provided less opportunity than males in education, employments and in other fields. Women are discriminated in all walks of life and which is making them handicapped and obstructing their empowerment. Women are considered as burden and debarred from their fundamental rights.

The socio-cultural empowerment of women is the urgent need of hour. This seems to be the best way to stop the degeneration of the society and to bring real harmony, happiness, progress, prosperity and peace in the world. It is a very complex phenomenon and needs multi-dimensional, multi-pronged and multi-disciplined handling. There is a

need of promoting education particularly of women, provision of employment opportunities to women, eradication of gender-based discrimination and also a need of harmonizing male dominancy, to make sure equivalent voice of women in decision making, promotion of vocational training for women, ensuring protection at place of work, elimination of health inequalities in order to empower women in all walks of life.

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