

# **Empowerment and Women Empowerment: Re-conceptualisation**

Dr. MEGHA PANDEY

**Lecturer (Public Administration)**

**Vikram University, Ujjain, M.P.**

India is ranked as the first most dangerous country in the world for women in Thomson Reuters Foundation expert poll, 2018<sup>1</sup>. Seven years back India was termed as fourth one in this same survey (Afghanistan, Congo and Pakistan are the world's most dangerous countries for women due to a barrage of threats ranging from violence and rape to dismal healthcare and "honour killings, a Thomson Reuters Foundation expert poll, June 15, 2011<sup>1</sup>) has been endeavouring for her women's empowerment since some last decades, but in vain. It is no real surprise that woman empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly-redouble efforts. And, the target is the sources of all the violence and ill-will toward women. The lack of humanitarian approach, lack of understanding of natural rights of human existence and lack of education based and work oriented society cause failure of any kind of policy having aim of empowerment, particularly women empowerment. India, since last 400-500 years and more, is having a society of tradition, customs, taboos and rituals over on natural and human rights, and particularly, anti-women. The widely accepted anti-women

---

<sup>1</sup> The global perceptions survey by Trust Law ([www.trust.org/trustlaw](http://www.trust.org/trustlaw)), the Foundation's legal news service. TrustLaw asked 213 gender experts from five continents to rank countries by overall perceptions of danger as well as by six risks: health threats, sexual violence, non-sexual violence, cultural or religious factors, lack of access to resources and trafficking. Female foeticide, child marriage and high levels of trafficking and domestic servitude make the world's largest democracy the fourth most dangerous place for women, the poll showed.

idea proceeded a hallow concept of women empowerment after political independence of the country. And, the patriarchal society of India is less humanitarian towards its half population.

### Who are the culprits of victims?

India's big policy portion is focused on development and empowerment of various sections of society who have long history of injustice and exploitation. These include Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Classes, linguistic and religious Minorities, and Women of all sections of society. Then, one can think on whom are the people making injustice to all above. While both men and women are the downtrodden and victims of social untouchability (SC), economic disparity and educationally backwardness (SC, ST, OBC and minorities), the women of remaining sections too have not free from natural and human injustice. In spite of some literary increment, educational development and social and economic upliftment, empowerment in its real sense is still untouched.

### Who are the violators of rights of women?

The world of crime is viewed as male enterprise in all nations, in all community, and in all the periods of history. The sub-culture of delinquency was uniquely male in character. (Cohen, 1955) Ours is a tradition bound society where women have been socially, economically, physically, psychologically and sexually exploited from the time immemorial, sometimes in the name of religion, tradition, social assumptions...both men and women are engaged in these exploitations and the concept of equality of male and female is seems to be unknown to us, in almost all parts of practical life.

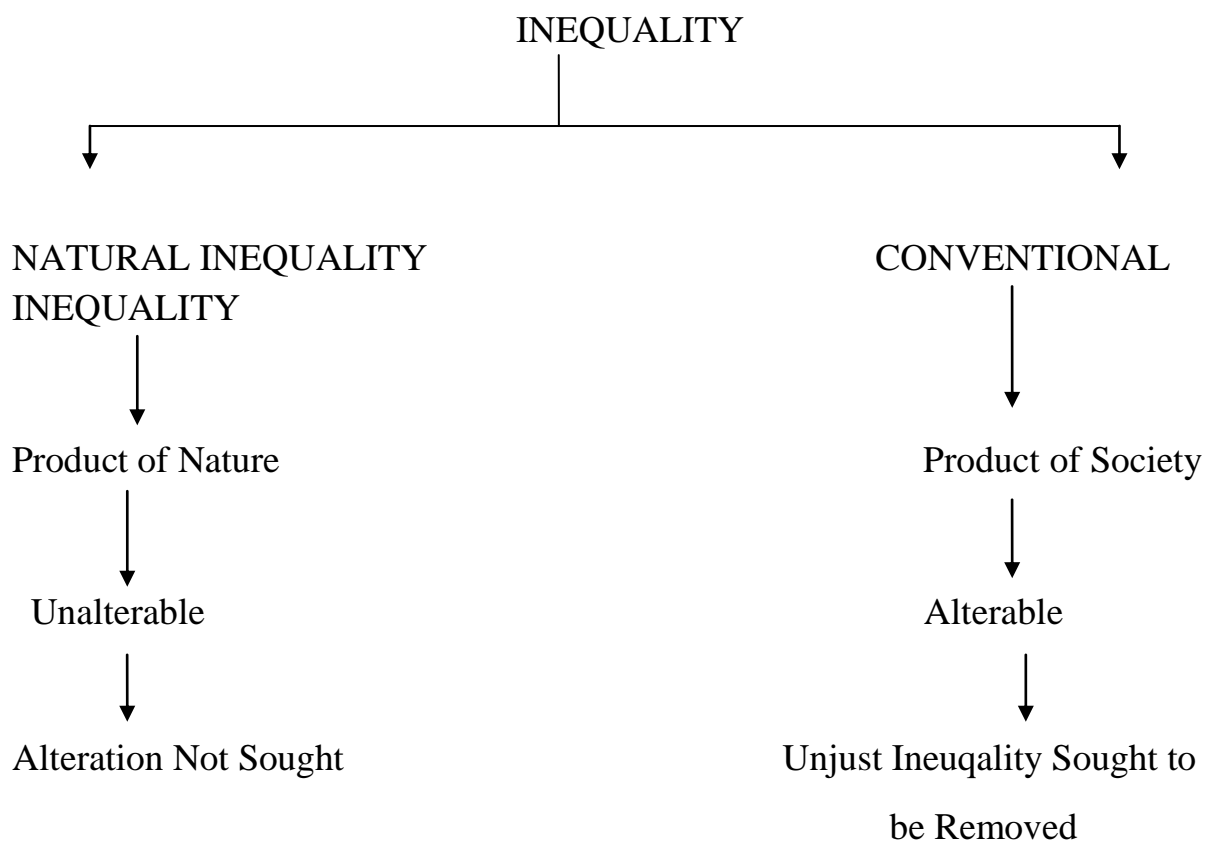
Generally and very commonly male community held responsible for exploiting women both at inside and outside (of home). Outside life of a woman is definitely dominated by male's wrong behaviour but inside exploitation and domination is credited to women of family. In other words women are equally

responsible for violation of rights of other women. Before analysing this view we need to re-understand the idea of empowerment.

### **What is meant by Empowerment?**

The overwhelming and hot issue of women empowerment in various policies and programmes of central and state governments seems to be a political formality as number of crime against women have continuously been increasing. India has been facing her half population with their physical assault, social domination, and weak (mentally-emotionally) in sense to walk with time etc.

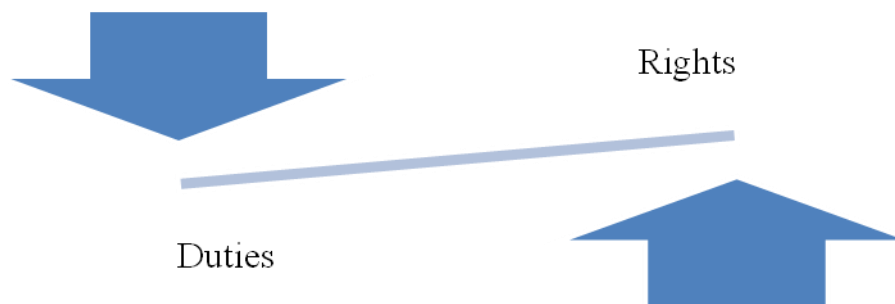
J.J. Rousseau in his 'Discourse on the origin of Inequality' (1755) suggests equality as an idea of social change and favours scientific thinking about the social structure led to the demand for social change. He drew an important distinction between the two types of inequalities found in social life. O. P. Gauba has figured out this idea as follows:



To be 'empower' means to have access over natural rights, to have access over human rights. It has two dimensions; Rights and Duties.

As the society and men are conscious only for their Rights and unaware, insincere basically, of their social, political and moral Duties is a society of injustice, crime and undevelopment. The rights-oriented dealing of empowerment of any fraction of society results in to dissatisfaction and non-supporting attitude by other fractions of society. This finally causes failure of developmental and welfare policies.

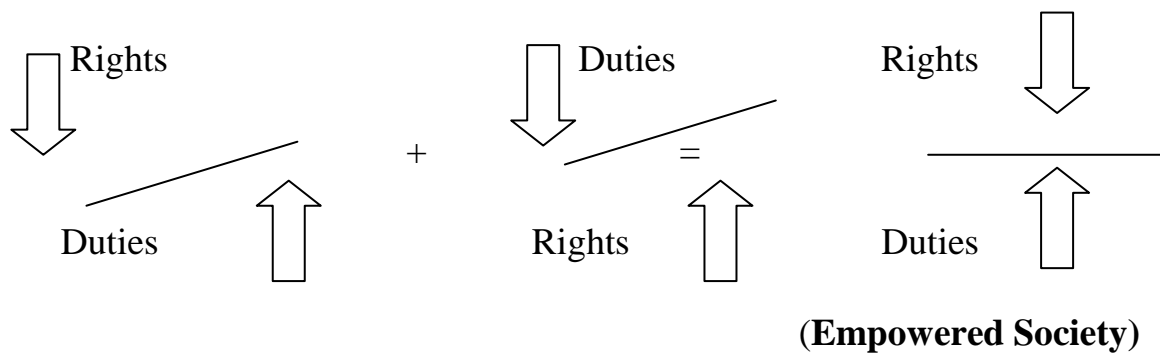
The present (common) idea of empowerment is Duty-oriented



Empowerment should be re-conceptualised and re-framed as Right-oriented



Another Simplification of broader idea can be as

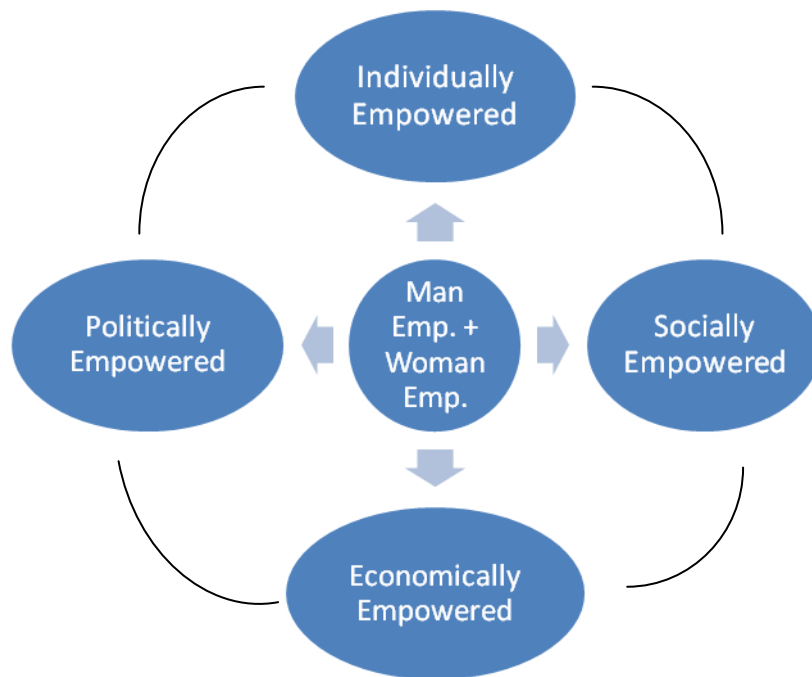


### Narrow View (Popular View/Assumption)

The narrow concept of empowerment says an individual powerful enough for his/her social, economic, and political rights in social and political system. It restricts the overall growth of individual.

### Broader View (the Rational Approach)

Empowerment is a process to achieve strength and power of independent existence. This strength covers economic independency, physical and mental health, emotional and psychological balance, social-political and legal equality and religious –spiritual freedom.



In the simplest of words, it is basically the creation of an environment where an individual can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Gender discrimination is the least of worries for women in India, known otherwise as the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women.

Thus, empowerment should be (Re)conceptualise as-

EMPOWERMENT = RIGHTS + DUTIES

i.e

EMPOWERMENT = AWARENESS for RIGHTS + SINCERITY  
towards DUTIES

Thus, it means,

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT = AWARENESS for WOMEN RIGHTS (BY  
MEN & WOMEN)

+

## WOMEN SINCEREITY towards THEIR DUTIES (FOR MEN & WOMEN)

### **Key Elements of Empowerment**

1. Education, not mere literate, with good understanding and common sense
2. Independency of thought, mind, and brain
3. Freedom of wearing clothes, jewellery, performing rituals
4. Freedom of religious and spiritual activities
5. Financial independency
6. Decision-making right on marriage, child, property dealing and others.

### **Types of Empowerment**

#### A. Individually Empowered-

- a) Educated plus well understanding
- b) Good health
- c) Spiritually empowered

#### B. Socially Empowered-

- a) No gender discrimination
- b) No caste discrimination
- c) Freedom of religious-ritualistic-traditional activities

Harmful traditional practices perpetuate the inferior status of women. The misfortune and irony of the fact is that women themselves mentally and emotionally attached in a fatally way to all those taboos, traditions and customs which basically were developed to restrict their status in society and in the family. Some of these harmful practices include;

- dowry and after marriage customary provisions which bound girl's parent to give gifts and money to daughter's in laws e.g. at the time of Godbharai, Namkaran sanskar/chauk, Mundan etc. ,
- parda-pratha,
- rituals which restricts women's food and movement activities, assumptions associated with childbirth, nutritional taboos,
- forced sex and forced reproduction for son preference.

This category of violence and injustice can be categorised in to two-

- (i) Injustice and violence performed at girl's own parent's home. With growing awareness and education violence under this category is decreasing, particularly, in middle and upper middle class families.
- (ii) Injustice and violence performed at women's in laws' home. Despite of many effort crimes and injustice of this category have not decreased expectedly. The difference between girl and daughter-in-law is still persist in all kinds of families.

Traditional practices harmful to women (and children linked to them too) inflict both immediate and long-term mental and physical pains, and in many cases caused sickness and death from hemorrhage, infection, keloid formation, and consequent obstructed labor. Ironically; While many traditional practices and restrictions are meant to protect women in dignified ways, actually, weakened their confidence, understanding and decision making power. Consequently, weak women always weaken lives of their male members in sense of supporting, advising and guiding. Women, in India, feel proud to display that they are well protected by their husbands without realising that they are making themselves mentally dependent, indecisive and helpless.

#### C. Economically Empowered-

- a) Employed and decision-making power on earning
- b) Unemployed but decision-making participation on financial activities



- Most of the women's economic literacy is so low that they cannot play any role in family's financial decisions.

- For most of the women national budget, national and international issues, political, social and other policy based news are for men and not their cup of tea, while movies, soap operas are for them.

#### D. Politically Empowered-

- Political understanding while voting
- Political understanding on various issues
- Independent working on political portfolio

Categorisation of empowered women:

The diversity in Indian society and families in terms of traditions, customs, rituals, taboos etc. gives diversified picture of women status in different communities while for the sake of convenience and to go with the broader concept of women empowerment, the Indian families can be categorised as-

- Upper Class/Rich Families
- Upper Middle Class
- Lower Middle Class
- Lower Class

And, the general picture of women status (except exceptional) can be categorised as -

CLASS	WOMEN STATUS	THRUST AREA OF EMPOWERMENT
Upper Class/Rich Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financially independent or strong</li> <li>- Social, cultural and political exposure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spiritual development</li> <li>- Understanding and sensitive attitude toward lower strata of society</li> </ul>
And	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educationally sound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leading and guiding</li> </ul>

Upper Middle Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher sense of civic sense</li> </ul>	postures for meaningful and constructive way of life
Middle Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Struggling for financial upliftment</li> <li>- Less exposure of social and cultural life</li> <li>- Indifferent on political issues</li> <li>- Un productive Educational awareness</li> <li>- Limited civic sense</li> <li>- In the clutches of rituals, traditions, taboos</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sense of financial rights and duties</li> <li>- Political, social and cultural education</li> <li>- Productive result of educational awareness</li> <li>- Upgrading civic sense</li> </ul>
Lower Middle Class And Lower Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor financial position. Struggling for survival</li> <li>- Educationally Poor</li> <li>- Poor sense of civic sense</li> <li>- No exposure on social, cultural and political front</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Upgrading civic sense</li> <li>- Productive result of educational awareness</li> <li>- Political, social and cultural education</li> <li>- Financial sufficiency and estabality</li> </ul>

It is find that the character and number of crime and injustice varies to these different family classes with some common and variant reasons.

### **Issues of Women Security**

Women abused physically and sexually are one of the most common crimes against women in India. Indeed abused mentally and emotionally is more prevalent. From last years, cases of gang rape and heinous murder after rape have increased fast. Even after law amendment after Nirbhya Case (December,2012, new delhi) the judicial speediness is not up to the requirement.

Are Indian male are sensual? Is Indian society is inhuman towards its half population? Is Indian society uncivilised and narrow-minded? These questions may create debatable picture and the answers may be disturbing too, in the sense of natural justice to women.

### **Women Empowerment: the Real Meaning**

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.<sup>ii</sup>

It is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equal in the society.

### **Conclusion**

The long downtrodden situation of women and increasing number of crimes against women can be elucidate by applying multi-dimensional measures developed scientifically, logically and impartially. Sincere efforts to bring out sea-change in the mind – set of the people, particularly of the women is the thrust desire. Before awaking men, women are essentially need to awaken for their rights and as well as duties. The rights-oriented dealing of empowerment of any fraction of society results in to dissatisfaction and non-supporting attitude of others. This finally caused failure of developmental and welfare policies. Thus, each and every part of government policy and programs of the government should encompass the logical idea of empowerment along with logical addressing the issues of reservation, subsidy, and scholarship etc. Government's efforts should to create and maintain the ecology and

environment for an ideal civil society for achieving an uniform empowerment for all sections of society.

'A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness.'

George W Bush

==

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://poll2018.trust.org/>

<sup>ii</sup> National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001, clause- 1.9.