

## Human Rights and Empowerment of Tribal Women

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*Empowerment of tribal women is an important division of the concept of women empowerment. In this study the researcher discusses various aspects associated with human rights and empowerment of tribal women.*

**Key words:** Human Rights, Tribal women, Empowerment.

On 10th n 10th December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article -1 proclaims. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." But everywhere men and women are in chain. In the developing countries like India, women in general and tribal women in particular are relatively powerless, with little or no control over resources and little decision making power.

The tribal in India constitute about eight percent of the total Indian population, the material states in which poor tribal women live are-low wages, poor nutrition, and lack of access to health care, education and training. The need of the hour is to 'empower' the tribal women so that they live the life of equality and dignity which are being denied by our society.

'Power' is key word of the term 'empowerment' which means 'control over resource (physical human, intellectual, financial) and ideology (belief, values and attitudes)." The material assets may be of any type- physical, human, financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and agencies, labour, money and access to money, and knowledge information. Ideas can be included in intellectual resources. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behaviour, 'virtually' determining how people perceive think, and function in a given socio-economic and political environment.

But the women especially the tribal women have not been able in making control over material assets, intellectual resource and ideology as yet in spite of constitutional provisions in regard to raising their status enhancing their quality of life, bringing about gender equality and gender justice.

Empowerment of tribal women not only refers to economic liberalization but also to access to opportunity, right to decision making and access to education, health services and information. When we talk to empowerment of tribal women, it requires to deal with some of the complex issues that are central to women's empowerment and gender equality and to adopt a holistic approach.

Literacy is the first step towards their empowerment. When we see the literacy status of women in the Jharkhand state, a very dismal picture is witnessed only 39.38 percent of women are literate, in rural Jharkhand, only 30.33 percent women were literate as per 2001 census report. For empowerment of tribal women, it is required to promote education for tribal women's self empowerment at all levels and in all fields to ensure equal access to relevant quality education and training. Besides, it is essential to encourage their equal access to knowledge in all fields, notable within science and technology and increase tribal women's participation in higher education.

Empowerment of tribal women can be achieved through supporting tribal women's human rights by strengthening initiative for a broader ratification and a more effective implementation of normative instruments pertaining to tribal women. Integration of legal literacy for tribal girls and women at all level of the educational system can serve a lot in this direction. Promotion of the attainment of gender parity, tribal women's full citizenship and equal participation in policy making is a prerequisite for true democracy at the local, national and international levels by assisting them is the elimination of stereo typed roles and expectation. Besides, it is of immense importance that tribal women should also have access to economic and labour opportunity through

work, and carrier choices so that they will become self-dependent and economically secure.

Women from weaker sections of society have suffered long due to repression. They are considered as a weaker sex and are given a subordinate status in the society. She is protected by the father in her childhood, by the husband in her adulthood and by the son in her old age. The factors of sufferings of women particularly tribal women are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural beliefs in India. The present paper attempts to highlight the issues related to human rights and empowerment of tribal women. The first section of the paper attempts to clarify the human rights perspectives. The second section deals with the concept of women's (ST women's too) empowerment with its various dimensions and the third section suggests positive interventions in regard to tribal women's empowerment.

## I

On 10th December, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That opening lines of the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights read the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. The preamble also reflects that 'the peoples of the United Nations have in the charter reaffirmed their faith in Fundamental Human Rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social, progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

There are two basic meanings of human rights. One is that the inherent and inalienable rights are due to man (the human being), because he or she is man (the human being). These are the moral rights that flows from the humanness of every man, women and child, and these rights go to ensure the dignity of human being. The other meaning of human rights is contained in the legal rights, formulated and established according to the law-creating processes of societies, both national and international.

The rights proclaimed in the Declaration can be broadly divided into two kinds - one dealing with civil and political rights and the other governing economic, social and cultural rights. The civil and political rights are 'the right to life, liberty, security of person, freedom from torture and slavery, political participation, right to property, marriage and the fundamental freedom of opinion, expression, thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association and assembly. The economic, social and cultural rights relate to work, a reasonable standard of living, education and freedom of cultural life. The Declaration has thirty articles, and its first twenty one articles correspond, for the most part to what are called civil and political rights, as mentioned above, relating to the individual's freedom and physical security.

Let us have a look at the first article of the Declaration which proclaims - "All human beings (man and woman) are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should, act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. It expresses the universality of rights in terms of the equality of human dignity. But in the developing countries like India, women in general and tribal women in particular are being denied their human right of gender equality. Gender equality is one of the most important social rights of an individual. The tribal women are relatively powerless, with little or no control over resources and little decision-making power.

## II

20th century will go down in history as a century of two great world wars, of two explosions-atomic explosion and population explosion, of a number of inventions in the field of physical, medical, engineering sciences. The last quarter of this century is marked by a series of efforts towards raising women's status, enhancing their quality of life, bringing about gender equality and gender justice.

The first effort on the global level was made in 1975, the year which was observed as the International Women's year and it had its motto-Equality, Development and Peace. As a part of the IYW programmes an International conference on women was held at Mexico in 1975. As a follow-up of the conference that United Nations declared 1976-1985 as the International Decade of women. A mid-decade conference was held at Copenhagen in 1980 to revise the programmes undertaken by different countries during the preceding five year period (1976-1980).

The mid-1980's saw the term empowerment, has become popular in the field of development especially in reference to women. As Srilatha Baltiwala observed, 'In grass roots programmes and policy debates alike a, empowerments has virtually replaced terms such as welfare upliftment, community participation and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development and intervention.' Empowerment has become the key solutions to many social problems like high population growth rates, environment degradation and low status of women. The concept of women's empowerment appears to be the end result of a number of important critical discussions, dialogues and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world and particularly by third world Feminists. The interaction between feminists and the concept of "popular education developed in Latin America in 1970s with its roots in Friere's theory of 'Conscientization' and influenced by Gramscian thought generated need for participating mechanism in institution exploitative system and society in order to create a more equitable and non-exploitative system.

In nut-shell, education, employment and empowerment are the three 'E's for the advancement and progress of tribal women.

In development parlance, the term 'Empowerment' has been hackneyed to such a surfeiting extent that it has almost joined the band of clichés. Yet we cannot disregard what the word stands for. Through the rhetoric about women's empowerment is all-pervasive, the concept has remained it defined, and its relationship to demographic processes has not been well-articulated, either theoretically or empirically. Hence there is a need for promoting scholarly dialogue on the demographic and policy dimension of women's empowerment, a dialogue that might help to elaborate the multi dimensional aspect of the concept and stimulate further research that goes beyond the crude indicators that researchers currently depends on.

'Power' is the key-word of the term 'Empowerment' which means the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resource (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and ideology (belief, values and attitudes). The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type-physical, human, financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and agencies, labour money and access to money, knowledge, information. Ideas can be included in intellectual resources. Control over ideology, signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behaviour - 'virtually' determining how people perceive, think, and function in a given socio-economic and political environment. This calls for not only greater extrinsic control, but also a growing intrinsic capability-greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing tradition ideology.

While the momentum of the empowerment process depends on the rapidity with which women change themselves, policies and the actions or attitudes of those in charge of programmes can either create a supportive and conducive environment or act as an obstacle.

### III

The tribes in India constitute about eight percent of the total India population. This means that about four percent of the total Indian population is tribal women. The material state in which poor tribal women live are- low wages, poor nutrition and lack of access to health care, education and training. The normal tribal women are active part of our workforce. They bear the burden of 'paid' work as a part of the workforce and unpaid work in the house. It is said to see that besides constitutional protection, development has not benefitted tribal women. They are still at the lowest rung of development.

Empowerment of tribal women not only refers to economic liberalization but also to access to opportunity, right to decision making and access to education, health services and information. When we talk to empowerment of tribal women, it requires to deal with some of the complex issues that are central to women's empowerment and gender equality and to adopt a holistic approach.

Literacy is the first step towards tribal women empowerment. Literacy among tribal women is very low. This Literacy deprives them from all opportunities and prospects of leading a meaningful life and enjoying a good standard of living. Though, it

is also true that literacy, by itself cannot be expected to be a panacea to all their problems, it is a very important factor towards the attainment of the intellectual, moral and social uplifting of tribal women. It equips them to fight against injustice exploitation inequality and all forms of violation of them human rights. It is required to promote education for tribal women's self empowerment at all levels and in all fields to ensure equal access to knowledge in all fields, notable within science and technology and increase tribal women's participation in higher education. Legal literacy to tribal women will serve a lot in checking, violation of their human rights, no doubt. Empowerment (in legal terms) of tribal women can be ensured through supporting tribal women's human rights by strengthening initiatives for a broader ratification and effective implementation of normative instruments pertaining to tribal women. Integration of 'legal literacy' for girls and women at all levels is a pre required for preservation and as safe-guard to their human rights.

Promotion of the attainment of gender parity tribal women's full citizenship and equal participation in policy making is also a per-requisite for true democracy at the local, national and international levels. It is required to assist them in the elimination of stereotyped roles and expectations with a view to promote more equitable sharing of responsibilities and rights in the family and in society at large. Besides, it is of immense importance that tribal women should also have access to economic and labour opportunities through work and carrier choices so that they will become self dependent and economically secured.

Education, employment and empowerment are the three 'E's for the advancement and progress of the tribal women.

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