

Emancipation of Women through Participative Pedagogies: Role of Consciousness- Raising Groups in Women's Praxis

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Abstract

This paper highlights the need and importance of consciousness- raising among women. Consciousness-raising is very much essential for emancipation of women. This paper elaborates the situation of women and the problems they face in society. The critical analysis explains that most of the problems are the result of the fact that women themselves do not raise their voice for their rights. They do not discuss their problems with each other and therefore lack a praxis. There is the great importance of participative pedagogies (dialogue and sharing experiences) with each other for consciousness-raising among women. This paper focuses on the concept of consciousness- raising, and role of consciousness-raising groups in emancipation of women. It also sheds light on historical background of consciousness-raising groups and suggests a mechanism to introduce CRG among women in our society to transform their lives.

Keywords: *Consciousness-raising; participative pedagogies; Praxis; Consciousness-raising groups; emancipation of women; Empowerment of women;*

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Background

Women constitute half of the world's population. They have many social, economic and health related issues. In most of the cases they are not given the due rights, place and respect in the society which they deserve. Most of the uneducated women are confined to the boundaries of the home. They are overburdened with domestic chores. Their all works go unappreciated and unrecognized in most of the cases. Moreover and most important is that they do not have decision-making right even not about their own selves and their kids. They do not enjoy that level of respect and honor that they deserve.

Those who are educated and working outside have more problems including job related pressures, work place harassment, and more importantly work-life conflict. As they are integrating work and family roles they are having cost to themselves. These women are integrating work, childcare, and elder care.

They work for longer hours than men. This seriously affects their emotional physical well-being. These women report that their children have lack of attention, watch more television, act out, eat too much junk food, have too little adult supervision and underachievement in schools. The women attribute distressing behaviors in their children with their long work hours which they spend out of the home. Although they are contributing in economic prosperity of their families but quality time which their family and children demand they are unable to provide. Due to one or many reasons they are not able to focus on moral and ethical training of their children. Due to this many social problems are raising.

Moreover they face advancement inequity between men and women, and underrepresented in senior positions. They do more than expected to be seen as competent. Despite of the efforts, hard-work and sacrifices they do not get leading positions in the organizations and such positions are more

dominantly occupied by men. This again creates stress and depression among women.

The young women who are students at university or college also have also diverse problems. Adjustment problem, academic problems, negative gender-role stereotypes in relation to course/subjects selection, societal pressures, insecurities, harassment negative biases, and many other problems jeopardize their energy and causes anxiety and lack of confidence among them. They want some mentors in the form of female teachers who share with them their struggles, conquests and accomplishment and guide them to overcome these obstacles.

Women whether they are working or non-working, educated or uneducated, students or professional face many problems. They are arising due to the misconception that my problems are unique and these problems cannot be shared with any one and if they are discussed with other women they will not consider them worthwhile. But reality is that no problem is unique. In one way or the other all the women are facing same problems with some contextual differences. These problems can be solved by sharing them with the women in the same surrounding and context. The sharing of problems and discussion can provide various solutions for the problems. This mutual sharing and deliberation may provide a way forward for solution through praxis.

Consciousness-raising (C-R) is a tool that was adopted by Women's Liberation Movement from the Civil Right Movement in the 1960s. In consciousness-raising groups women answered different questions by using examples from their own lives. These examples were used as personal testimonies by the group in order to reach to some conclusion of those problems that were so-

called personal problems but had a political root.

Consciousness-raising is a strategy for collecting and analyzing data about women's life experiences, understanding that whatever pains and troubles are in their lives are neither individual nor can be solved at their own. It is to think that whatever problem one is facing is not the unique but is faced by many other women. They are those problems which need collective analysis and taking action on the basis of that theory which has been developed by collective analysis. Consciousness-raising conclusions become basis for theory as well as for praxis. Consciousness-raising is incomplete without emotions and experiences.

There were certain feminist movements which brought to light the inequalities of the sexes regarding human rights; education, politics, and employment. Some of these movements were 1920's achieving the right to vote, 1970's movements for equality in education and workforce (Kumar,et.al, 2015)

Consciousness-raising is an essential element of Paulo-Freire's theory also. He calls it Conscientization. He has spoken throughout his life for the liberation and empowerment of oppressed. He believes that people are oppressed as they do not speak against it and this gives encouragement to the oppressor. He believes that in order to get rid of oppression the oppressed should raise his/her voice. Fritze states that Freire actively supports the acquisition of knowledge, and believes that those who have knowledge are perceived as human which are subjects. They can think and reflect for themselves. And those who do not have knowledge are man as object and who act and keep on obeying without taking time to reflect. They are like animals. For him without knowledge people cannot survive. Moedzakir and Mappiare (2015) stated that Paulo Freire initiated effort of empowering group through the concept of radical and

critical theory. His key concept called Praxis was an effort of making community aware by posing a problem in a dialogue mode and leading to a psychological action and reflection

According to Carol Hanisch who was part of Second Wave Feminist's Movement relate her own experiences of those consciousness-raising groups. She states, consciousness – raising was a way to use their own lives, their combined experiences to understand explicitly how they were oppressed and who was actually oppressing. Consciousness –Raising was not simply a sharing insight and analysis, but it was a process that activated the “second-wave” feminism (Freedman, 2014).

1.2 Research Objectives

The research was conducted to:

1. Explore concept of consciousness-raising.
2. Investigate history of consciousness-raising groups.
3. Investigate role of consciousness raising groups in emancipation of women.
4. Suggest a mechanism for forming consciousness-raising groups in Pakistan.

1.3 Literature Review

“Consciousness-raising is a process through which one can increase his/her awareness about one's own or another's problems, attitudes, behaviors and needs”. “Consciousness-raising (or CR) was used as a primary tactic of second wave feminism. Consciousness was regarded as a way of developing a shared realization of oppression among women. Consciousness-raising groups were founded to encouraging women to share their personal life experiences, such as childhood, motherhood and marriage. The

belief was that, far from each story being individual, common patterns would emerge, thus demonstrating that female experience, rather than being exclusive to the individual, was in fact rooted in a wider system of sex inequality. Consciousness-raising groups did not aim for total introspection, but advocated moving on from personal narratives to evolving strategies to deal with oppression.

1.4 Consciousness-Raising Groups and Second Wave of Feminist Movement

Consciousness- raising(C-R) is used as central and most powerful tool for awareness building. Consciousness –raising groups were formed in the late 1960s and 1970s as a part of second wave of feminist movement in New York and Chicago. They were named as, “Telling it like it is”

Consciousness-raising groups consisted of not more than 12 women, they were used to come across and discuss on different issues. They had their meetings on monthly basis or so, and shared their experiences with each other. These groups proved to be backbone of second –wave feminism. The women, who joined these groups, examined their lives, shared their experiences, and developed their theory based upon them and took action on the basis of those theories. So these C-R groups prepared women for praxis.

Consciousness-raising was used as a pedagogical tool for disseminating the information about already developed theories for getting assistance in action and also as a radical tool for creating theories collectively and devising praxis upon those theories. The central feeling in consciousness-raising groups was of sisterhood. Those who joined these groups felt a strong and warm feeling of close affiliation or attachment with each other. The women realized that those problems which they were facing were not unique but identical to many other women in their own community.

Paulo Freire has used the word “**conscientização**”. He calls consciousness-raising as conscientizations. It is translated as "consciousness-raising" or "critical consciousness". It is a process of making people aware of their oppression, and sources of oppression. Blackburn (2000) calls conscientização as the key to comprehend Paulo Freire’s liberating education. He believes that illiteracy does not allow people to understand their oppression and they do not have the intellectual confidence to analyse critically about their oppressive situation in the world. He says that they may be unaware of the fact that they are being discriminated and they are poor. This is all result of unjust structures found in society. Paulo Freire asserts that if people understand these unfair structures and mechanisms then they can be changed. For this the critical thinking is very much essential. **Conscientização** is the process of enhancing critical thinking of oppressed that is regarded as a first step in achieving empowerment.

Paulo Freire has very beautifully related the concept of humans with consciousness. For him consciousness-raising is very much essential for the oppressed. This is the only way that can make them to survive in this world. . Oppressor considers oppressed as object in and with this world. Whether the oppressed are women, or underprivileged people, they should try to improve their lives and bring themselves to the level of subject from the level of object. He believes that there is unequal relationship between those who are powerful and who are powerless. The powerful keeps on oppressing the powerless.

Kumar et.al (2015) states that, “Women can do everything that men can, and they even do it better. They also can do many things that men cannot. But there is a fact that their work is not appreciated as men’s although they have to sacrifice a lot for their family and career” .

A framework is suggested by Friedmann for defining empowerment. It is threefold framework that relates it with accessibility to social power which is considered as a social wealth, political power that is access to decision-making processes and the third aspect of empowerment is access to psychological power that is self-confidence. Empowerment demands praxis. It is a collective identity that leads towards decision making. Praxis is combination of action and reflection and these two activities cannot be separated. Every conscious human activity is theory and reflection.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative approach was employed for this research. Data was collected through extensive review of related literature available in the form of books, articles, and text material on websites.

2.1 Common Problems/Experiences for consciousness-raising

Now the question comes that what will be discussed in these consciousness-raising groups. The answer is that any type of experiences or problems which majority of women are facing can be the point of deliberation and sharing. All women can share their life experiences about that problem. These problems or experiences can be about childhood, adulthood, marital life, motherhood, or even about work place. The questions that may be asked in these consciousness raising groups can be from day to day trivia to the very much serious issues. The women may share that what they feel they can do being a female. What strengths their gender has given them, what limitations they face due to their gender? How they feel at the end of a day’s work? Is there anyone who care them or to whom they give care? How much time they spend in supporting or helping

others. How is their performance measured at work place or home etc.

2.3 Characteristics of Consciousness – Raising Groups

A consciousness-raising group will be different from other groups. This group will be having only women as members. It will be a safe space for discussing issues particularly feminist issues. There will be a mutual trust among all the participants. It will focus on structured discussion about those which women have in common. There will be a development of class consciousness based on collective experience. These groups will be having an element of education as women can share and guide each other on common feminist issues.

These groups can prove to be really helpful as in this way women will stop self-blaming for structural problems. They will start to look at each other and the world in a different way. Through consciousness-raising women will feel strong bond between them and friendship will develop in them. It will inspire a collective organizing. And more importantly this will build a female worldview and female culture. These groups may be organized at street level, college/university level and at work place also. Such groups can provide chance to women to meet regularly, share their experiences about a single problem and then devise some solution for the problem.

2.4 Implications of Consciousness-Raising Groups in Our Society

Consciousness-Raising groups can be created in our own set-up. Women not more than 12 can meet at one place more appropriately in their own locality. The women can be said to talk in turn so that every woman can have a chance to share her point of view.

Consciousness-raising can be explained under these areas and sequence. Consciousness-raising groups as explained above are those groups which encourage women to share their point of view about their own problems, feelings, behaviors, attitudes and needs and also of other women. The common problem in our culture is that females do not express themselves with others or do not share with each other. As sharing of ideas is minimal that is why the problems keep in increasing and increasing and a lot of further problems rise due to this non-sharing.

Consciousness-raising groups have proved to be very much successful in various countries in order to increase awareness among women. This is one tool to provide opportunities to women to be expressive, and listen to each other. This provides a feeling of sisterhood.

There is the suggestion that these small groups may be initiated at street level or community level in which women not more than twelve interact with each other on regular basis most conveniently after a week or so. It may be decided according to convenience of all the group members. They may speak on each issue or topic turn by turn. In this way all the women may have an equal chance and no one may dominate the discussion. In the very first meeting the women can introduce each other and also share their background. In this first meeting they can share the reason of joining these CRG. These groups should be kept intentionally small so that those women feel acquaintance and can share with each other easily. Every week they can have the different topics. As consciousness-raising really depends upon participation so every woman should be given the chance to speak and share and take a better action on the basis of experiences of their own and also of other having the same problems. They can give a voice to those feelings which were considered as unimportant and dismissed by them.

When they will meet with each other on regular intervals, their hesitation will be decreased and they would feel that they are connected with each other, and a mutual bond is existing among them.

One way to put these into effect is that women meet with each other in group, decide a topic and on that topic each woman share her own personal experience. Then all of them reflect on that, analyze the incident, consequences, and then mutually decide that what action should be taken in this regard. This is a process that moves towards action that is called praxis. Praxis is an action that is based upon some reflection. The action which has its basis on reflection gives a better solution to the problem. Paulo Freire calls it critical consciousness where the person fully realizes that what is his/her problem and then takes action. For him this is called a transformative learning. He believes that Dialogue is necessary to bring valuable change.

In every session, women can have deliberation on one topic of interest and share their own life experiences with each other, this way can give them more power to tackle with their personal problems as well as societal problems that have emerged from personal problems. This is a way that can emancipate women from oppression. They can become empowered and this can create a culture of sharing. Reflection can lead to praxis and praxis can lead to emancipation.

Consciousness-raising groups can be created in educational organizations. They can provide a forum to young girls/ women to think about those problems which they are facing. These problems can be of social,

educational, political or economic nature. They can come across and share what the problems which are disturbing them. When they will share their problems with each other they will realize that they are the common problems and many others are the victims of them. It will enhance their critical thinking, and decision-making abilities. This will provide them courage and confidence to go for the solution rather than just suffering them.

3. Conclusion

Consciousness-raising is an act or instance of creating awareness among women about their own personal problems and problems of other women through sharing of experiences. They can come and meet with each other within their own community in small groups. They can share their experiences with each other one by one. This creates a sisterhood feeling. These groups provide equal opportunity to all the women members to participate. All members reflect and analyze and decide an action to be taken. This is called praxis. Praxis is a tool to create awareness that gives a voice to women and a practical way to solve their problems and bring a social change. Consciousness-raising cannot be implant, it cannot be deposited, it is the something that needs a realization of her condition as oppressed, and a conscious effort through praxis. It needs collective struggle. The women need to come and share their problems with each other, discuss the mechanisms through which they can get rid of their problems and come to a point where they can improve their condition and can come to the level of subject with own feeling, being for herself rather than an object for other people.

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