

Importance of Women's Empowerment in India

RUCHI GUPTA

Abstract

In India, The realities of rural life in India are difficult to comprehend. We are now witnessing a steady improvement in the enrolment of women in schools, colleges and even in profession institutes. Their health is better as compared to earlier decades. In this decade, women are entering into the job market in increasing numbers field showing their skills even in non-traditional sectors like police, defence, administration, media and research fields. In the political field, the reservation for women is a significant step forward towards their political empowerment. When thirty-three percent reservations for women in Parliament becomes a reality, women's voice will be heard in the highest forum of democracy. The day, women of India will reach zenith in their empowerment. People were not allowed to share own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. The present seminar has been planned with a view to discuss the various issues related to the Empowerment of Women and to suggest measures for achieving this end. In India population according to the 2001 Census, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54% up from 9% 1951. In order to help women to be in popular, they necessary to be empowered. There is a condition for empowerment of women is to the transform a developing country into a developed country. In this paper we are highlighting that in India country women's strength is critical and we explain the critical value of women how improve their value & status for some ways.

Keywords- Economics, Status, NGO, PEP, Improving, CEDAW.

Introduction

In the empowerment of women include many things - economic opportunity, social equality, and personal rights. Women were deprived of those human rights, often as a matter of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity, and hence, they are relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labour. We are now witnessing a steady improvement in the enrolment of women in schools, colleges and even in profession institutes. Their health is better as compared to earlier decades. In this decade, women are entering into the job market in increasing numbers. They are showing their skills even in non-traditional sectors like police, defence, administration, media and research fields. Twenty-six laws have been enacted so far to protect women from various crimes. In particular define empowerment is depend just like that power cannot change if power cannot be change. If this is inherent in neither positions or nor people, then empowerment impossible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way. Bookman & morgen et.al in 1984 defining that empowerment status of women level on that time, women level on that only born child and work at home VARA LAXMI is definition in an article way by A Sustainable approach for Women

Empowerment through Micro-finance, the micro-credit or micro-finance has got much avowed attention among government circles, voluntary sector and the academia. More importantly after the success of Bangladesh's Grameen Bank started by Prof Mahammad Yunus who bestowed with the Nobel Peace prize for 2006, for the efforts to create economic and social development from below. There is also mounting evidence to show that the availability of financial services for poor households - such as micro-finance -can empower the rural people to achieve their goals and enhance their lives accordingly. It is assumed that women's control over income will lead to increased well-being for women and their children. This individual economic empowerment is also assumed to lead to wider social and political empowerment. NGO plays an important for role for improving empowerment. This Asian-foundation organization two running program MDG-3 (Gender, Equality and women empowerment) & the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for women empowerment.

Concept

In India, the empowerment process has already begun. For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. While a small minority of people in major cities have benefited from the information revolution of the past decade, the lives of most people in rural India (over 650 million) have hardly improved. Now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women. Twenty-six laws have been enacted so far to protect women from various crimes. These are very positive signs which imply that women can be leaders. Though some women have shown their mettle yet a large number of them have to sharpen their leadership qualities in various ways. The recent law on the 'protection of women against domestic violence' satisfies the long pending demand of the women activities. But a lot of work has to be done as there is a category of women (who consider themselves highly educated) that proudly accepts that they don't have digital literacy even though they own a computer, they cannot even operate bank accounts or make travel arrangements for family or handle hospital admissions even during emergencies. Even for a simple task like social visits or shopping generally they need the company of their husbands. Women should remember that they are also rational, intelligent and thinking human beings. Dependent women are not empowered women. If modern women think that they are empowered, it's a myth for them. Empowerment means to inspire women with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs, patterns and societal or religious conditions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to realize their true beauty and power.

Different Levels of Empowerment

In line with most theorists on empowerment the one has to view empowerment as taking place on different levels and that change on all levels is necessary if the empowerment of women is really to occur. We have to relate empowerment at three levels: empowerment on the individual, group, and societal/community level and the interaction between these.

The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal.

The group level deals with the collective action and sense of agency that woman experience together, in a group.

The societal level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do, how women should behave etc.

The different levels are seen as connected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal level. Women who are empowered on an individual level will most likely go on and affect the other levels. Empowerment on a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self esteem and sense of agency.

Historical Background of Women Empowerment in India

The status of Women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. In early Vedic period Women enjoyed equal status with men. Rigved & Upanishads mention several names of women sages and seers notably Gargi & Maitre. However later the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500 B.C., the situation worsened with invasion of Mughals and later on by European invaders. Few improvement movements by Guru Nanak, Jainism, Raja ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Pandita Ramabai and others did give some relief. It is not that Britishers didn't do anything for improving the condition of women. Some laws were enacted such as "Abolition of practice of Sati", Widow Remarriage Act 1856 etc. Feminist activism picked up momentum in India during later 1970's. Later on many groups and NGO's have been working for the Empowerment of women. We are proud that in India Women got voting right much before USA and some other European countries.

Empowerment of Women in Rural India Today

The realities of rural life in India are difficult to comprehend. While a small minority of people in major cities have benefited from the information revolution of the past decade, the lives of most people in rural India (over 650 million) have hardly improved. A majority of villages do not have sustainable economies, and only through oppression of women and lower castes can the landlords, upper castes, and government officials support a better life for themselves. Private initiatives are lacking as the government, to preserve its power, has placed obstacles and disincentives at every step. For example, modern healthcare for all of rural India is a free government service, but the reality is that the delivery of primary health care has failed miserably. A number of charitable institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a positive role, often assisted by government grants and foreign donations. NGO, s and civil society at large in order to use the research document as a springboard to launch a sustained advocacy strategy to achieve the MDG-3 target of 33% of women in parliament. Our operating premise is that improving, economic and political opportunities for women improve societies as a whole. The foundation seeks to identify change agents build constituencies for reform around key issues affecting women's states and promote internal efforts to identify and solve problems

Empowerment of women involves many things - economic opportunity, social equality, and personal rights. Women are deprived of these human rights, often as a matter of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity, and hence, they are relegated mainly to household

duties and cheap labour. Without the power to work and earn a good income, their voices are silenced. Even in matters of sex and child bearing, women often do not have the ability to oppose the wishes of their men.

Birth control and reproductive health of women are behavioural issues affected mostly by economics, access to health care, and education. Until this reality is accepted, the desired changes may not be attainable in the foreseeable future.

In a society where men control the destiny of women, how is it possible to empower women? Simply encouraging women to resist the wishes of men would not only fail, but would create mistrust of any goodwill attempts from "the outside" to help rural communities. Women will gain power only when both men and women begin to respect and accept the contribution of women. Developing women's capacity for income generation without threatening men is key.

Two Stories (First story)

First story based on The George Foundation placed in Bangalore, India and founded in 1995, was established to help alleviate poverty, promote health and a clean environment, and to strengthen democratic institutions and values in India. We have come to know of the following two events, among many others, in the course of our work with the families of the children in our boarding school, Shanti Bhavan. The first case involves a young pretty mother who was living with her son in a small hut. Her husband had earlier abandoned her, and she was not able to return to her parents as they considered her "unworthy." One morning, she accompanied two men from the city who promised employment for her in the Middle East following an interview at an office somewhere, only to be gang raped and then returned to her village after a few days. Her absence was noticed by her neighbours, who blamed her for the outcome and accused her for the separation from her husband. Feeling shame, and finding that she could no longer live in the community, she set herself on fire with kerosene.

Second story

The second story is about a middle-aged woman whose husband had more than one "wife," a common practice in rural India though not officially allowed. One of his wives contracted AIDS somehow, and while her illness had become generally known, he continued to have sexual relationship with his other wives. He made no effort to medically test or to take adequate protection measures for himself or his other women, and soon all involved contracted the disease. These two real life stories represent the endless number of lives lost from ignorance, the low status of women and their inability to control their destiny.

Some example work improving & reason for failure

Dharmapuri District in Tamil Nadu State, India, has been identified as one of the most backward districts in the nation in terms of health and development. This District is remote and the project described below is carried out in an area about 24 kilometres from the nearest city, Hosur. Infrequent and irregular public transport hinders quick access to government emergency health services. Education facilities are limited to government primary schools of poor quality, and the nearest high school is located 10-15 kilometres from many of the villages served by The George Foundation's projects

Reason: - In Dharmapuri District the Foundation has attempted to facilitate the development of a model community consisting of several villages that prosper from sustainable and integrated economic activities. Health and education facilities are being renovated, and economic opportunities are being shared, especially among the socially disadvantaged castes and women. In this article Transitioning from a command and control culture to employee empowerment requires a commitment to long-term change. Too often, management fads and quick fixes in the name of empowerment have been implemented rather than relevant changes in management systems, structures, and cultural values. To be successful, empowerment must be seen as a long-term program of employee participation and involvement. but this type of program cannot run for long time.

Why is there still a Need for Women Empowerment?

In spite of the various measures taken up by the government after Independence and even during British rule the Women haven't been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in India occupying highest offices of President, Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Sonia Gandhi, and Leader of the Opposition or women like Ms. Chandra Kochar occupying highest positions in the Corporate Sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women. Some create history in space & sport like Sunita Williams & Saina Nehwal, Sania Mirza & Anju Bobby George The female feticide is common phenomenon. The male female ratio though improved over last few years is still far from satisfactory. It is 940 women per 1000 men for India in some states it is as much lower as 877. These are the states where female feticide is maximum. The female literacy rate is also lower than the male literacy rate. The ground reality is deprivation, duration and exploitation of women specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sectors of the society. The Urban élite class women have no doubt been benefitted by the efforts of women empowerment.

Way of Improving Empowerment of poor women in India

The World Bank has been the major source of external funding through loans to governments (never directly to private institutions) for specific projects. Very few projects have ever met their goals; in fact, most rural projects have been dismal failures. Unbearable bureaucracy, terrible inefficiency, and corruption at all levels of the government have wasted much of the money allocated to rural development. Furthermore, the local officials who manage projects that target women do not themselves believe in the potential of women. Yet the process continues, without an alternative. International agencies continue to pour money into these programs, only to benefit the middlemen. Clearly, a new approach is required to have an impact on the lives of women in rural India, and to ultimately help stabilize population growth. In this article the people empowering People (PEP) program uses the definition of empowerment to connect research, theory and practice. The PEP program builds on theory of critical adult education developed by Friere (1970), Horton (1989), and others. The focus is on the connection between individual action and community action encourages individual change through training sessions and discussions and supporting action through participants give people the opportunities, resources and support that they need to become involved themselves. Nanette Page review in own article about PEP, empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. In PEP as in we strive to teach people skills and knowledge that will motivate them to take steps to improve their own lives-to be empowered. President Pratibha Patil said that women empowerment is of utmost importance if we want women's progress. He said "Creating the environment which imparts equal status to women in family, society and country is the sole motive behind various facets of programmes being run for women empowerment. We have to work towards making them able to take their own decisions," .Stressing on the importance of education, the

President said, "Education is the first tool of empowerment. Right to Education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan have ensured that education is available to children between the age group of six and 14. Be it a boy or girl, every child must get education. It is these educated women who can in turn educate other women and teach them independence and self-confidence. In this report develop the empowerment improving mater from Financial Inclusion. MasterCard embarked on an initiative to further the process of women's empowerment in the country in partnership with SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association). SEWA is a leading Indian organization that works towards helping women in securing employment opportunities, empowering them to be self-reliant with supportive services. I had the unique privilege of participating in SEWA's activities and witness their success first hand at the recent inauguration of the seventh Rural Urban Development Initiative (RUDI) processing centre at Bodeli, near Vadodara, Gujarat supported by MasterCard. Through this program we will provide full-time employment opportunities for women in 100 adjoining villages to begin with and will expand to a catchment of 300 to 500 villages in Gujarat. This will help benefit approximately 2,000 farmers and 400 SEWA members.

Women's Economic Empowerment through Co-operative Farming, Vocational Training & Business Development
Due to the lack of specific implementation plans and faulty representations, local communities have not adequately accepted government and private schemes for the upliftment of women. Women have not actively participated in their own emancipation due to their lack of economic independence and rampant illiteracy. Therefore, The George Foundation decided to address this important issue of women's empowerment in India by raising the status of women in Hosur Taluk through economic empowerment and education.

Krishnagiri District is the most backward district in Tamil Nadu. In the geographical location selected, there are no high schools, no private schools, inadequate primary health sub-centres, and no NGOs. Roads, water supply, drainage and communication network are inadequate to augment economic development. Fragmented land holdings are not conducive to commercial farming. Child labour is rampant in this socially backward area. Population statistics of our country clearly indicate that quality education is out of the reach of the poor and marginalized irrespective of their innate potential. Women are often exploited by their communities. They have very little voice and no knowledge or means of improving their social and economic status.

In the villages of the area, the caste system is deeply entrenched. The lower caste colonies are ostracized and basic facilities are denied to them. Female infanticide is a common practice and women are punished socially for bearing girl

Children Gender biases are very evident in the preferential treatment given to the male child.

Rain-dependent agriculture, home-based animal husbandry, silkworm rearing and brick making are the main income generating activities. Fisheries, horticulture and industries have been established in a few select areas such as Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri and House. Rural folk find it difficult to travel to these cities in search of jobs. The average family income level is below the poverty line.

One of the popular schemes employed by several NGOs, and supported by some international and bilateral agencies, is the so-called "micro-finance" or small loans that usually range up to \$100 (Rs. 5,000) per woman to start some form of business. Notable successes have been recorded, and the program has received considerable world attention. Most poor women entrepreneurs are said to have been able to make their businesses successful,

and repay the loan. However, our experience in this area with lower caste poor women has been somewhat different.

Poor women, especially from backward communities and lower castes, are mostly illiterate, untrained, and have very little social and economic status. In India, there are over 350 million such people, mainly in rural areas. The unemployed are nearly 200 million people, a great majority of them belonging to these deprived sections of the society. Without meaningful skills, social status, and economic power, they are unable to do any business on their own even with financial assistance.

To start even a small rural business, it takes no less than \$500. According to some studies conducted by the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmadabad, the average capital need for a one-person small business is in excess of Rs. 1 lakh (\$2,000). Further, the chance of making any business successful is very small - the odds are barely 1 in hundred for an educated person. Uneducated lower caste rural women find it almost impossible to starting any such entrepreneurial work without adequate capital, proper training, and on-site daily support.

Based on our understanding of the problem faced in our rural community, we have devised a scheme for empowering poor and socially deprived women. The key ingredients of this program can be summarized as follows:

Adequate training in an area where the women have natural abilities and understanding (for example, farming and cattle rearing)

Use of superior technology to obtain better output and higher profits (modern farming techniques, such as use of proper fertilizers, deep ploughing, drip irrigation, etc.)

Creation of financial assets through savings (from profits generated from sale of produce, over and above wages received)

Ownership of physical assets (use of financial assets to buying cultivable land - $\hat{A}\frac{1}{2}$ acre per family)

Sharing of resources such as wells, tractor, etc. among several farmers

Provide a support system that addresses concerns, difficulties, know-how, etc.

Access to information and markets (knowing what high-value crop to grow and when, which markets offer higher prices on a given day, tie up export contracts, etc.)

Only when these requirements can be met, we believe poor illiterate rural women can be expected to turn into entrepreneurs.

The George Foundation has purchased/least 250 acres of land. An executive committee composed of representatives of The George Foundation, village panchayats, and agricultural consultants has been formed.

Under its direction, the soil is being prepared for crop cultivation. Superior seeds of selected crops have been purchased. The panchayats members are highly motivated about this project. People from the surrounding villages is participating in the preparation of the land for farming. This program will be expanded to cover the neighbouring state of Karnataka in its later stages.

Members of the village panchayats, the village administrative officer and the block development officer have been with the project from its planning stage. The geographic community and the community of beneficiaries, particularly poor rural women, were involved in planning and implementation of the project.

Changing Social Institutions to Improve the Status of Women in Developing Countries

Figure 1 highlight how social institutions affect the economic role of women, i.e. their chances to have access to the labour market and to better paid and more qualified jobs such as professional workers, technicians, administrators and managers. Social institutions can exert their influence in two ways. Traditions, customs and social norms can constrain women's activities directly - by not allowing them to start their own businesses, by refusing them jobs that involve contact with or managing men, or by simply not allowing them to leave the home alone. All these direct factors lead to an exclusion of women from entrepreneurial activities that are often the first step towards independence, self-esteem and liberty of choices. Morrison and Jutting (2004) analyse empirically the relationships between social institutions and the economic role of women. They measure the depth of discrimination caused by social institutions with economic (ECO) and non-economic (NON-ECO) indicators (for explanation, see Box 1). They find that the higher the value for ECO and NON-ECO variables the lower the probability that women will play an active role in the economy. A further econometric analysis puts into question the widely believed view that a rise in income will generally facilitate women's access to the labour market.

Conclusions

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality. Then only the Vedic verse "Wherever Women is respected, God resides there" would come true. The best gift parents today can give to their daughters is education. If women choose to be ignorant then all the efforts taken by the Government and women activists will go in vain. Even in twenty-fifth century, they will remain backward and will be paying a heavy price for their dependence, so, it is a wake-up call for women to awake from their deep slumber and understand the true meaning of their empowerment. In the end I would like to conclude with the following words, "Women as the motherhood of the nation should be strong, aware and alert".

Despite the difficulties that are likely to be encountered, we believe it is possible to bring about major improvements to the lives of women in rural India. Well-planned and properly managed private initiatives can succeed in empowering women, provided the approach taken is sufficiently holistic. The time has come to go beyond small pilot projects that hardly ever lead to major undertakings. There has been much needless suffering for too long by a majority of the world's population. It would be a noble and worthwhile effort to prove the

concept on a large scale, probably for several million people in an area. That would require considerable organizational skills and management talent, with a clear focus on accomplishing set goals in a time-bound fashion. The success of such a program would be the model that international funding agencies and philanthropic institutions can build upon, and serve as a departure to the failed policies and programs of the past.