



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN ODISHA THROUGH SHG

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ABSTRACT

Political empowerment is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision-making process will lead to women empowerment in the true sense of the term. Political empowerment of women refers to the equitable representation of women in decision making structures, both formal and informal and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their as well as society. Political empowerment for women is regarded as a key driver for economic and social empowerment. SHG played a vital role for political empowerment in odisha. It will help them to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and confidence so that they can perform in a better way. But due to lack of awareness, illiteracy and social dogma still political empowerment of women in odisha is not up to the level of satisfaction. The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to successful women organizations to take up the responsibility encouraging the women elected representatives. This could be taken up by the leaders of women's movement in the state.

KEYWORDS : political, empowerment, SHG, capacity building, decision making

INTRODUCTION

The word empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their choices. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control and transformative action. Empowerment of women signifies harnessing women power by consisting their tremendous Potential and encouraging them to work towards attaining a dignified and satisfying way of life through confidence and competence as person with self-respect, rights and responsibilities. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. The conference defined empowerment as "A redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women. It is "the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power Empowerment is a multi-faceted process which encompasses many aspects i.e. enhancing awareness, increasing access to resources of economic, social and political etc." In recent years women empowerment has become a subject of great concern for the nations all over the world especially in poor and developing countries. The impact of globalization is seen eventually on position of women in some form or other in most of the developing countries with the variation of degree. The United Nations has also strived hard in an incredible way to draw the due attention of the World Community on this issue in the past years. Women Empowerment refers to an increase in the strength of women such as spiritual, political, social or economic. The most common explanation of "Women's Empowerment" is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. Thus, women empowerment occurs in real sense when women achieve increased control and participation in decision making that leads to their better access to resources it often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Empowerment has many aspects but the present study focusing on political empowerment in odisha through SHG.

Political empowerment of women is a part of the overall empowerment process. Political empowerment is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision-making process will lead to women empowerment in the true sense of the term. The PRIs are playing a central role in the process of enhancing women's participation in politics and decision-making process. Besides, social and economic empowerments, SHGs also have a great impact on political aspects. Some of the indicators for the

political empowerment looked into were;

- Their membership in other organizations,
- Participation in Gram Sabha,
- Contesting elections to Local Self Governments and holding responsible positions in various committees at the three-tier Panchayat system etc.
- Active participation in formal discussions,
- Democratic decision-making process,
- Conflict management within the SHG level,
- And the efficient management of SHGs, etc. which had already been examined, also enhanced their political empowerment.

SELF HELP GROUPS (SHGs)

Women and SHGs in many parts of the country have achieved success in bringing the women to the main stream of decision making. The SHG in our country has become a source of inspiration for women's welfare. Formation of SHG is a viable alternative to achieve the objectives of rural development and to get community participation in all rural development programmes. SHG is also a viable organized set up to disburse micro credit to the tribal women and encouraging them together into entrepreneurial activities. Self Help Group (SHG) is a small voluntary association to form a group. It is informal and Homogenous group of not more than twenty members. SHGs consist of maximum 20 members Because any group having more than 20 members has to be registered under Indian legal system - That is why, it is recommended to be informal to keep them away from bureaucracy corruption, Unnecessary administrative expenditure and profit motive. In fact, it is a home grown mode for Poverty reduction which simultaneously works to empower and shape the lives of its members in a better way. Groups are expected to be homogenous so that the members do not have conflicting interest and all the members can participate freely without any fear Self-help groups (SHGs) Movement has triggered off a silent revolution in the tribal credit delivery system in India. SHGs have proved as an effective medium for delivering credit to tribal poor for their socio-economic and political Empowerment.

SHGs in Odisha

Different Agencies like DRDA, MISSION SAKTI, ORMAS, SIDAC, NABARD, DIC, KVIC, and TRIPTI AND JANASADHANA are working for the promotion of microenterprise programme in odisha. It is providing training to the women SHGs on Badi, Pampada, Spices, Agarbati, Pickles, Invitation, and Greeting Cards; Readymade garments making, handicrafts items, stone carving, Appliqué, Terracotta, Wooden toys, and several other items for establishing their own enterprises. After giving training, these organisations take

care for arrangement of finance for SHGs for the purchase of raw materials and equipments for production of goods through bank linkages and microfinance. The SHGs utilize the money in the production of Badi, Pampad, Chhatua, Spices, Agarbati, Pickles, invitation and greeting cards, readymade garments, handicraft items, handloom items and several items. In order to enhance the knowledge of women SHGs about production and marketing these training organisations makes arrangement various exposure visit for trainees of food processing training programme to food processing unit like OMFED. Similarly, the visit to Ready Made Garments Unit, Spices unit, Carpet units, Handlooms and Handicrafts unit etc. are also arranged by these organisations. They also guide the SHGs to participate in various mela, exhibition both inside and outside of the state organized by Government and Non-Govt. Agencies for sale of their products. The respondents reported about their participation in different activities organized by microenterprise training programme.

Women became a member of Self Help Group in the beginning stage. Then, she involved herself in different credit and saving activities. Earlier it is found that the group members regarding the credit of the group took maximum decision. Respondent's husband took decision regarding the utilization of money always. In the present investigation, decision-making capacity of the respondents related to personal, family matters and savings studied before and after the training for microenterprises. Because, decision-making capacity is considered as an indicator of women empowerment in the present investigation and decision regarding savings of income is considered as capacity building.

In most of the village, male heads of the families are involved in agriculture farming and small business in the nearby market places. When they provide money alone to meet all family expenses, it becomes a burden on them, in meeting partial and small demands of the family expenses. Due to the involvement of women in microenterprise programme, they could earn something and it lessens the burden of head of the family to some extent. Besides that help, they also contribute more and more in maintaining the relationships by buying gifts for family members, treatment of the family guests, buying of new work simplification gadgets for household works, new dress for their husbands, sons and daughters. When the women do not have income, they have to ask consult the family heads about what they want to buy and why they need money. On the other hand, income-earning opportunities give women certain level of freedom of choices to buy their personal items, recreational items, and decisions regarding their business. It is fact that when the women engage in income generation programme and start contributing to the family expenses, the women start enjoying respect of the family. This change implies that the status and respect of the women in their family are raised. Since they share more family responsibility, they command relationship of trust in families and their family members appreciate their work and feel proud for them.

Micro Finance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy. In Odisha, micro finance scene is dominated by Self Help Groups (SHGs) – Bank Linkage Programme, aimed at providing a cost effective mechanism for providing financial services to the “unreached poor”. Based on the philosophy of peer pressure and group savings as collateral substitute, the SHG programme has been successful in not only in meeting peculiar needs of the tribal poor, but also in strengthening collective self-help capacities of the poor at the local level, leading to their empowerment. Micro Finance for the poor and women has received extensive recognition as a strategy for poverty reduction and for economic empowerment. Increasingly in the last five years, there is questioning of whether micro credit is most effective approach to economic empowerment of poorest and, among them, women in particular. Development practitioners in India and developing countries often argue that the exaggerated focus on micro finance as a solution for the poor has led to neglect by the state and public institutions in addressing employment and livelihood needs of the

poor. Credit for empowerment is about organizing people, particularly around credit and building capacities to manage money. The focus is on getting the poor to mobilize their own funds, building their capacities and empowering them to leverage external credit. Perception women is that learning to manage money and rotate funds builds women's capacities and confidence to intervene in local governance beyond the limited goals of ensuring access to credit. Further, it combines the goals of financial sustainability with that of creating community owned institutions.

Political empowerment of women in odisha through SHGs:

Of all empowerment with their importance, political empowerment may be considered more vital one. The empowerment is particularly meant for participating in political decision-making process. And the process normally affects society. Political empowerment of women refers to the equitable representation of women in decision making structures, both formal and informal and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their as well as society. Political empowerment for women is regarded as a key driver for economic and social empowerment. Economic empowerment can provide the clout for women to be empowered politically. Political empowerment allows women to take control of the policies that will prove beneficial for their economic empowerment. In odisha, the society is having a well established system of traditional, political organization. The village matters mostly decided in the meeting at the village councils. These councils were purely of a democratic nature and such meetings are also attended by women although they are not permitted to take part in deliberations except in cases concerning them.

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also the advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards, and Trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies, will be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women-friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process. Legislative enactments have dramatically increased women's access to decision making structures over the last decade. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments passed in 1993 provide for reservation of 33% of elected seats for women at different levels of local governance in both tribal and urban local bodies. Also there would be one-third reservation for women to posts of chairperson of these bodies. One-third of the seats are further reserved for women belonging to the SC/ST community. But still the political participation of rural women in odisha is quite low compare to other state. After introduction of SHGs, it not only brings social and economic empowerment but also have great impact in the political sphere.

• Engaged in political activities

SHGs members are actively participated in different political activities throughout odisha. They attained election meeting, campaign, etc. Members are also participated in different pressure groups

• Increased participation level in Gramsabha meeting

SHGs members are actively participated in gramasabha meeting on different issues. This increases their political education and participation. Participation in Gram Sabha is an indicator for political empowerment and participation in the decision-making bodies. Poor women's political empowerment also is shown through their increased participation in the decision making process within the family. SHGs are found to be effective means for encouraging poor women to participate actively in Gram Sabha. The following table gives the increase in the level of participation of respondents in Gram Sabha before and after they became members of SHGs.

- **Improvement in leadership qualities**

SHG increased the leadership qualities of women in rural area. So many women were participating in panchayat election. SHG not only bring social empowerment among the women at the same time it provides opportunity for political participation and leadership.

- **Involvement in solving problems related to women and community**

SHG workers also involving in the issues related to women. That proves the leadership quality of them. Gender inequality, domestic violence, protest against liquor are the issues against which SHG members protest.

- **Decision making capacity in family and community**

Promoting tribal women's political participation and involvement in public affairs does not benefit women alone, but also men and communal life generally. This makes women's effective involvement in politics a crucial issue with far reaching consequences on the development of society as a whole. Women's participation in politics may take various forms such as active involvement in community life, civil society organizations, local bodies and government institutions. In all such instances, women should be equally and effectively represented in various processes of decision making. Decision Making Political empowerment of women is a part of the overall empowerment process. Political empowerment is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision-making process will lead to women empowerment in the true sense of the term. The PRIs are playing a central role in the process of enhancing tribal women's participation in politics and decision-making process. The state legislature of Orissa Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2011 by amending the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act, 1964, Orissa Panchayat Samitee Act, and the Orissa Zilla Parishad Act enhanced the quota for women from the existing 33% to 50%. The 50% reservation for tribal women in Panchayati Raj institutions is an important part of this empowerment of tribal women.

- **Capacity Building**

Capacity building enhances the ability and skills at the individual level to realise her full potential and live a more happy and meaningful life. This is an enabling and empowering process to work as a group and play different roles, necessary for development and maintenance of the group. It is important from the point of view of empowerment that women are not only capable of functioning as a group, but also are able to effectively participate in the process of economic activity undertaken by the group of women. Capacity building of women in the areas of planning, executing, and monitoring all aspects of the economic activity is equally desired in this context. Their efforts in mobilizing poor women in small groups, initiating awareness generation programmes, making thrift and credit available to such groups along with leadership development from within the groups, sensitizing them on community problems and social issues and enabling them to resolve them, developing their capacity and latent entrepreneurial skills, etc. are included in the capacity building process. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group. Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organise, manage and carry out activities, to deal with people and institutions in the world around them make the poor women empowered. In this study, capacity building was looked into from general skills required to function as an effective group member and management of SHG, and skill development training programmes for initiating income-generating activities. The general skills studied were communication skills, leadership qualities, self esteem and confidence, and other skills required for effective management of SHGs like maintenance of accounts, writing of reports, handling bank transactions etc.

CONCLUSION

In regard to the process of empowerment of the female

representatives one can positively claim that they have gained in many respects due to SHG. The female PRI members mentioned their gain of new knowledge about politics in general as well as about local issues relevant to their constituencies as one positive effect of their presence. In discussions during the panchayat meetings they get informed about specific problems of their locality and planned projects. Furthermore, they are now involved in solving part of those problems. They also attain information concerning government programmes. As a result of their new knowledge and their participation in local politics they have thus acquired a greater interest in politics. Additionally it became evident that women highly valued their new freedom to move out of their homes and as well as their integration into village affairs. Prior to their election they could only leave their home in order to visit relatives or to perform household duties, like fetching of water and fuel. Now they can venture out to participate in the panchayat meetings, to go to the Block office, and some even discuss with villagers about current problems. Generally speaking women have achieved a higher visibility in the village communities, which should be rated as a very important development for rural odisha. Thus SHG contributed a lot for the political empowerment of women in odisha. But due to lack of awareness, illiteracy and social dogma still political empowerment of women in odisha is not up to the level of satisfaction. Government should take major step regarding the problem that hurdles political empowerment of women

An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about attitudinal change in both men and women. Therefore, they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both. There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. It will help them to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and confidence so that they can perform in a better way. The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to successful women organizations to take up the responsibility encouraging the women elected representatives. This could be taken up by the leaders of women's movement in the state. They can also provide support to sensitize the rural women. The Government should provide security to women candidates from criminals, during and after elections, till they are in office. However, a sincere will of the Government, co-operation of the people as a whole would encourage and increase the empowerment of women in turn, would lead in true sense, the development of a society.

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