



A Study on the Role of Empowerment of Women in the Development of a Nation with Specific Reference To Rural Areas

KEYWORDS

ASD, maternal stress, maternal age, folic acid.

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ABSTRACT

The paper titled on "A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO RURAL AREAS" clearly explains the role of empowerment of Women in Rural areas towards its economic growth and development. The main focus of the study is to understand how it plays a crucial role in the development of rural areas which is considered to be a predominant part of the study. This study clearly states the Characteristics of Empowered Women and various schemes implemented in the rural areas for improvement in the National Development.

INTRODUCTION:

At the millennium summit in 2000, the 189 member states of the United Nations made a commitment in the millennium Declaration to achieve eight goals labeled as the "MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDS)". The third goal on this list seeks to achieve gender equality and the EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. By setting this goal UN member states recognized the contributions that women made to economic development. Women throughout the world play critical roles in economic growth and development and their contribution have an important impact on households, communities and National economics (Grown, Gupta and Khan 2003).

OBJECTIVES:

Thus the objective of Empowerment of Women includes raising standards of living through provision of more jobs, better Education, humanistic values and more purchasing power to increase availability and distribution of basic life sustaining articles like food, shelter, clothes, Health care and social security.

EMPOWERMENT:

The social Work Dictionary (Barker 1991) defines empowerment as the process of helping a group or community to achieve political influence or legal authority. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their lives. It is a process that fosters power (i.e. the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their Society. (Page and Cuba 1999)..

Empowerment is an intermediary factor that leads to other developmental outcomes (Socio political outcomes). Empowerment is not an end in itself. Rather it is a means to achieving other ends. Empowerment is closely related to the fortunes of women population World over including India. Women are disadvantaged and neglected lot (World Bank 2001)

India has 37% of the world's population earning less than US \$ 1 a day of which 60% are Women. (HRD 2030). Women are an important element of economic development and a holistic economic development cannot be possible without women empowerment which in turn depends on their long term engagement in economic activities. Two arguments support this notion. They are:

1. Majority of the poor in the world including India is Women.
2. Empowering Women will transform the entire household and not the concerned person alone.

Empowered mother has a greater say in domestic issues and this leads to better education, health and wellbeing of the children and the entire household and the Society.

The World Bank reports that societies that discriminate on the basis of gender have greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower standard of living (World Bank 2001). Studies in Latin, America and elsewhere show that men typically contribute 50 to 68% of their earning to the household fund while the Women tend to keep nothing back for themselves (Chant 1997) because Women contribute decisively to the well being of their families. (Mayoux 2005)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Empowering Women means enabling them to realize and utilize their full potential to take part in the decision making to exercise control over their lives and to take active part in socio economic and cultural development of the Nation.

The workshop of Pacific Women, entitled Women Development and empowerment 1987 venessa Griffen speaks about what empowerment is:

- Having control, organizing further control
- Having a say and being listened to
- Being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the entire society.
- Being able to define and create from a Women's perspective.
- Being organized, respected as equal citizen and human being with a contribution to make.

According to Hall (1992), the empowered women share the following characteristics.

- Empowered Women define their attitudes, values and behavior in relation to their own interests. They have autonomy and claim their freedom from male equals.
- Empowered Women maintain equal mind rather than act out to merely confront and challenge male domi-

nance. They do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equals and cooperate to work towards common goals.

- Empowered Women use their talents to fulfilling lives they maintain their strength in the presence of pressure from family, religion and work. They contribute towards empowerment of all Women.
- Empowered Women continue to meet the family responsibilities and participate in religion.
- Empowered Women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves. They strengthen themselves through other Women's vision. Their actions flow from their distinctive ideals.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Men and Women are the two halves of the society. While men make house, Women make houses. Jawaharlal Nehru held that Women must be trained to participate in every department of human activity and play an active part in all professional spheres. The five year plans have given special programmes for the welfare of women. Various policies and special programmes were implemented to improve the status of Women.

The first five year plan was framed with welfare perspective for women in 1953(Creation of welfare Board 1953). Stress was laid on the organization of women in MAHILA MANDALS or WOMEN CLUBS. To achieve the objectives of the first five year plan, the responsibilities of Women's welfare were entrusted with the private agencies like All India Women congress, National Council of Women, the YWCA and girls guides etc.

The second five year plan 1956-61 also laid emphasis on the welfare approach. The issues concerned were social, moral, hygiene and post care services. The welfare of the industrial women workers was recognized.

The third five year plan 1961-1966 was done with the view to match the women's skills with the occupations and provide them better opportunities. Education of Women was the prime concern. However, this 3rd five year plan was proved inefficient in implementing welfare projects to women and children. In the third, fourth and fifth five year plans, the ground for the development of Women was however formed.

Subsequently there was a shift from traditional way of perceiving Women as target for welfare and developmental projects and programmes to considering women as partners of and participants in planning. But nothing tangible could be achieved in the sixth five year plan.

In the seventh five year plan, for the first time, the mention of empowerment in its real serve and meaningfully could be decently adopted (1985-90). The plan demanded for integrating women in the nation building as equal partners. This was done to provide human rights and privileges to women with others in the society. The seventh plan made accessibility of women to such inputs and productive forces as Bank loan and technology.

The plan also provided for legal facilities and adequate work environment for women. In essence, the seventh plan was the beginning of looking at women's issues with a holistic perspective. It asked for empowerment of women.

These principles received prominence in the eight five

year plan (1992-97). In this plan women's developmental empowerment is stressed upon. Employment and income generation activities along with training for up gradation of skills have become the major governmental intervention for raising the status of women besides mainstreaming them into National Development.

The Bureau of Women's Development (BWD) is the national machinery responsible for the advancement of women in India and plays a major role in this National Endeavour. The programme of this BWD department includes employment and income generation, welfare and support service and gender sensitization and awareness generation programmes. These programmes play supplementary and complementary role to other general developmental programmes in the women related sectors such as health, education labour and employment, rural and urban development.

GOVT and non government agencies implemented so many programmes for women's development. Some of them are:

- Integrated Rural Development Programmers (IRDP 1980)
- Development of Women and Children in Rural areas (DWCRA 1982 - 83)
- Training Cum Employment cum Production centres (NORAD 1983).
- Women's Development Corporation(1986 - 87)
- Support to training and employment programmes for women(STEP - 1987)
- Jawahar Rozgar YOJANA(JRY - 1989)
- National Commission for Women(NCW 1989)
- Training Package for women's development - 1992
- Rashtriya mahila kosh (1992 - 93)
- Employment Assurance scheme 1993
- Indira Aawaz YOJANA (1993 - 94)
- Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY 1993)
- Monitoring of Beneficiary oriented schemes for women
- Information system on women(WIN - Women's information Network system)

The 73rd constitution Amendment Act 1993 was a form of affirmative action to reserve 33% of the total seats for all three tiers of panchayats and functionaries for women. The idea was to facilitate women's participation in gross roots politics, thereby empowering them to become partners of decision making process. Organizing self help groups have been a popular activity for income generation with Non-governmental organization since 1980.

Since the mid 1980s, microfinance for women has been considered as an effective vehicle for women's empowerment and a popular poverty alleviation strategy among other developmental agencies. The success of the Grameen Bank model in Bangladesh acted as a stimulating factor for the take off of microfinance in many other countries. The effort of the pioneer institution i.e. NABARD through its SHG Bank Linkage(SBLP) programme has added more than 22 lac SHG units connecting around 33 million households in 31 states and 583 districts with participation of 545 Banks and 4896 NGDS with more than 90% dominance of women groups(NABARD 2006).

MICROFINANCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The world Women conference at Helsinki has rightly recognized the credit scheme for rural women as the best technique of women empowerment. The co-relation between

credit and empowerment is always positive which has been established in all research studies.

Prof. Amartya Sen in his book "Public Action to remedy Hunger" in 1991 has recognized the role of microfinance in women empowerment and poverty alleviation.

Self Help Groups dominate the microfinance scenario as it is focusing more on poor women. Hence microfinance is emerging as a powerful instrument in the empowerment of poor women both socially and economically.

The concept of Women's credit was recognized by many women oriented studies that recommended access to credit by the informal sector. Before 1990 credit schemes for rural women was almost negligible. In modern economy the micro credit approach for women is considered as the best strategy to empower women economically.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

Economic Empowerment is that conscious state of womanhood where she will find herself equipped to stand against all odds impinged upon her by the outside world (Das 2002). Economic strength is considered as the basis for social, political, psychological power in society. (Naski 2004)

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT:

Deliverances from poverty to self sufficiency will naturally lead to social empowerment. Empowering of women contributes to social development and economic progress in any country could be achieved through social development (Gurumoorthy 2000).

EVALUATION:

Evaluation studies have conducted at periodical interval by distributing Structured Questionnaire to various levels with respect to Age Group and the reports given to reputed governmental Institution and universities. Remedial action if needed may be initiated by the states.

Table 1: Respondents by age.

Age	No. of Respondents
<25	10 (08)
25 – 34	30 (30)
35 - 44	25 (20)
45 – 54	20 (10)
55 +	15 (07)
Total	100 (75)

Table 2: Respondents by Attitude towards Women Empowerment and Age.

Attitude towards Women Empowerment	Age of Respondents					Percentage (%)
	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	
Favour	5	20	15	5	2	63%
Uncertain	2	5	3	2	2	18.5%
Unfavour	1	5	2	3	3	18.5%
Total	8	30	20	10	7	100%

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

This study determines the significance of various pro-

grammes implemented by competent Authority for empowering the women in the rural areas for the development of the Nation. The main criterion has been focused towards the role of empowered Women for the development of rural areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Primary Data: Collected from the sources Questionnaire.

Secondary Data: Collected from the sources of Books and Periodicals.

Sampling Method: Stratified Sampling

Sample Size: 75 Respondents

STATISTICAL TOOLS:

Descriptive Analysis.

SUGGESTIONS:

- The potential of microfinance bringing women empowerment is enormous. However microfinance alone cannot contribute fully towards women empowerment. Micro finance intervention measures should be webbed with other developmental schemes.
- A greater presence of microfinance institutions is required.
- Women's empowerment needs should be integrated into National Planning through better access to education developmental schemes, political freedom and designing policies and products which meets the needs of women.

CONCLUSION:

Given the complexity of defining women empowerment it is not surprising that only a few empirical studies have tried to examine the impact of microfinance on women empowerment. Most of the studies suffer from bias due to endogenous nature of the programme participation and unobserved households, individual and area characteristics. The unavailability of appropriate data that includes comparable controls and treatment groups which are the further constraints (Dr. Ramkumar and Mariappan Sundaram 2010).

The empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and supported by economic independence which implies access to production resources; the second component of empowerment is knowledge and awareness; the third one is self image and final being autonomy (Meenambigai 2004).

A number of researchers defined empowerment as a process of creating awareness and capacity building, leading to greater participation, greater decision making and control the transformation (Murugan and Dharmalingam 2000; Vadivoo and Sekar 2004; Ramachandran and Seilan 2005).

Empowerment encompasses many aspects enhancing awareness, increasing access to resources, - economic social and political. An equally important component is the mobilization and organization of women into groups – because these groups form the basis for solidarity, strength and collective action (Sudharani 2002). The empowerment of women would lead to benefits not only to the individual women but also for the family and community as a whole through collective action for development.

The need of the hour is to devise strategies to improve

the impact of microfinance and concentrate on specific issues like gender mainstreaming, product design, delivery systems, value added services and group dynamics.

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