



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DECISION MAKING POWER

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INTRODUCTION :

Women are an important integral part of every human society. The progress of any nation and society depends greatly upon women participation in all fields of life. Generally in the developing countries they are considered dependent. Women are encircled by the age old customs low literacy level, under paid lab ours and an unbroken cycle of child birth in urban and mostly in rural areas women are considered economically unproductive individual and their role in rural as well was urban areas is not recognized. Therefore, women need to make more concerted efforts to get their role recognized.(Kharal, 2000). The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.



The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

The Policy takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Five Year Plan and the other Sectoral Policies relating to empowerment of Women. The women's movement and a wide-spread network of non-Government Organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women.

However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, program's and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the Platform for Action, Five Years after an assessment. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other

manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices. As the present project aims to study rural women empowerment, there is need to know about the current status of the SC women.

REVIEW OF LITARATURE

Agboatwall (200) describes the health. Education and socio economic opportunity situations for women in contemporary Pakistan, highlighting the impact of gender differences on maternal mortality and on a female's quality of life. Pakistan's patriarchal society invests relatively little in female development, subjecting women to maternal dangers such as too young or too old pregnancies, unattended births, and sparse prenatal and postnatal care. In addition to one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, Pakistan also has a female mortality rate that is almost twice that for males. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to target unsafe birth practices, the lack of trained birth attendants, the lack of family planning, and the limited role of males in family planning. NGOs are also increasing the amount of informal schools to compensate for the lack of educational opportunities for rural women in a nation where educational investment is already at a minimum.

Chetsike (200) discussed that the gender analysis shows that women can only be self-confident and autonomous in their economic activities if no cultural restraints hold them back. This article identifies the most important issues to be addressed by programs and projects aiming to promote women's equality through entrepreneurship and makes suggestions for the future focus of gender programs, especially training.

Farooquee and Rawat (2001) explores the role of women in rural Himalayan society, particularly in Bhotiya, where women have enjoyed a fairly unique status as workers and decision makers, as well as domestically. Because of the rigors of the climate and agricultural demands, bhotiya women lead more physically strenuous lives than their plains counterparts, but their importance to the sustenance of agriculture and livestock invests them with a respect and authority in their communities. But the recent influx of capital into bhotiya, as young men seek wage labor in urban areas, find village women assuming increased agricultural responsibilities without sharing in the cash brought in to their households.

Ferguson,-Sandra-K.(1994) Although the majority of women retain custody of their children at the time of divorce, some women voluntarily relinquish custody. Because of societal expectations of mothers' roles, noncustodial women are often stigmatized. Drawing on illustrative case studies, these societal expectations are defined, identifying the environmental, intrapersonal, & interpersonal factors that a woman must consider when making custody decisions. The significance of a woman's decision not to retain custody is explored, & the role of social workers in establishing self-help groups for these women is outlined.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

After the independence, provisions were made in the Indian Constitution to provide equal rights and opportunities of socio-economic development and betterment of living for men and women, including different disadvantaged segments of population to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society. In view of grinning improvements in the socio-economic condition of women efforts were made to maximize the participation of women in different educational levels, with the notion that education is the most important instrument to bring awareness about their rights, social status, as a prime element to maximize participation in different kinds of productive employment. Of course general belief is that women were benefited from these opportunities. But the schedule caste women are not benefited completely from these kinds of privileges and opportunities. For this purpose, there was need to frame policies for the empowerment of the SC women in this way the self-Help groups, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Mahila Mandals playing an important role in empowering the women. There is need to know about the women empowerment activities in under development city areas and the role of

these self-help groups and NGOs in women empowerment. Hence an attempt was made in the present study about the women empowerment in under developed areas like Gulbarga.

Scope and limitations:

Considering the objectives of the study, the current research is based on a sample survey. That is the researcher visited all the self help groups owned by Sc women in Gulbarga city. It is noted that about 10 self –help Groups were formed by the women in this city .approximately 150 schedule caste women members of these groups are actively participating in the different activities. Hence it is being only the M.Phil dissertation and considering the time limitation in consultation with the Guide it was decided to have a small sample size but ideal to be analyzed .thus the 150 scheduled caste women .were surveyed thorough interview schedule considering them as an study sample unit.

METHODOLOGY

Study Sample:

Data on various social, economic and demographic characteristics, of respondents used in this study pertain to 150 scheduled caste women who are members of SHG. Gulbarga City of Karnataka state. All the SHGs in this city were surveyed at the time of data connection for a in-depth study by a researcher. During the course of enumeration, SHG s having only scheduled caste women members identified and all such available scheduled caste SHG women were interviewed. Data collected have been used in this study.

Data Collection:

The data were collected by using the direct interview method, with the help of a structured interview schedule. The schedule consisted of pages pertaining to conceptual information of various important concepts. The actual schedule administered is provided on appendix.

Data for the study were collected in phase wise During the first stage all the SHG in the study area were listed in order to collect basic data such as SHG address location and members strength. In the course of listing care was taken to identify all SC women members. The second stage of data collection involved visits to respective SHG where there were SC women available for conducting detailed interviews about the research study purpose. The data was collected during the months of November and December in the year 2009. Throughout the period of data collection, the researcher rather spend full day in the SHG and had the opportunity to have a first –hand experience of living and working amongst the respondents.

Analysis of the Data:

The data collected were coded, verified and processed on the personal computer at the University. A single frequency distribution of each variable was generated to validate that data was treated as dependent variables as they are influence by educational and occupational levels and other socio-economic variables such as religion, reasons for joining SHG on members and the type of residence. The dependent variable was cross-tabulated with each of the social and economic variables, an analysis of covariance (chi square X2 text) was used which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No. 1.1 : Who takes food first

	Frequency	Percent
Male	8	5.3
Female	8	5.3
Children	62	41.3
All together	67	44.7
Husband	5	3.3
Total	150	100.0

It was social convention Indian society that the husband or elder male member of the family must have to take the food first. Later all other members must have to eat the food. Hence, it was asked to the respondents, that who takes the food first in the family. The collected data is presented in the following table. The collected data reveals that about (5.3%) of the respondents stated that females eats food first, followed by (3.3%) of the respondents expressed that their husbands takes the food first about (41.35) of the respondents expressed that the male members of the family eats the food first and the remaining (44.7%) of the respondents stated that they all try to eat together

Table No. 1.2 : Who takes major decisions in your family matters

	Frequency	Percent
Myself	14	9.3
Husband	10	6.7
Both	85	56.7
In-laws	34	22.7
Elders in the family	7	4.7
Total	150	100.0

Making decisions in the family matters also plays an important role in determining the social and economic status of the Sc women. In majority of the families. The husbands or the male elder members are making the decisions. Hence, it was asked to the responses are shown in the following table . it is noted from the above table that about (56.7%) of the respondents expressed that both the respondents and their husbands make decisions in the family matters, followed by about (6.7%) of the respondents expressed that their husbands make the decisions, about (4.7%) of the respondents expressed that the elders in the family makes the decisions, only (9.3%) of the respondents stated that they make the decisions and the remaining (22.7%) of the respondents stated that their in-laws make the decisions in their family matters.

Table No. 1.3 : Over all impact of SHG on status on members

	Frequency	Percent
Considerable	69	46.0
Somewhat	43	28.6
Little	20	13.3
No import	9	6.0
As it is	9	6.0
Total	150	100.0

The level or extent of effectiveness, usefulness and impact of self-Help groups on Sc women show the efficient functioning of the self-help groups. Hence it was asked to the respondents to rate the impact of the self -help groups on members. The collected data is shown in the following table. It is observed from the above table that the self-help groups made some what impact on the Sc women as stated by (66.7%) respondents. Followed by (22.7%) of the respondents stated that these groups made considerable impact on members and the remaining (10.7%) of the respondents expressed that the groups made little impact on members.

CONCLUSION:

Women's Empowerment is critical to ensure the socio-economic development of my community. To bring women into the mainstream and to encourage their participation in the process of national development has, therefore, been a major concern of the Government. Despite all legislations, planning and developmental government schemes women remain a vulnerable group. The policy makers have to go in for a more broad based approach that addresses planning, adequate resource allocation, programme design and formulation, targeted intervention and implementation based upon the requirement of women residing at the field level with their participation. Gender mainstreaming has to be a guiding force in all these activities to maximize outreach of public expenditure and benefits for women. Further universalizing access is very important for meaningful outcomes. Inter-state and intra- state imbalances have persisted for a long time and need to be addressed more forcefully. Some overlap of gender and developmental issues will take place- this is inevitable given the wide gap in availability and requirement of socioeconomic infrastructure in the country.

The Self-Help Groups are aimed for economic empowerment in Karnataka. To achieve their purpose, the women have to start productive occupations. But the study revealed that the women are borrowing loan from the Self-help groups for domestic and unproductive use. But it is worth to note that majority of the Sc. women respondents agreed that the women should have to work outside the family, so as to get respect and status. Further, education to the women is emphasized by the rural women respondents. It is surprising to note that majority of the Sc women know about the self-employment schemes of the government, but most of them have not got benefit from these schemes, Hence. There is need to increase awareness among the Sc women regarding these schemes and the Non-Govt mental Organizations have to play an important role in such activities. The majority respondents agreed that they are making decisions with their husbands in their family, which shows that the equal participation of the women in the family. Majority of the Sc women also agree that the women are equal with men in all respect. It shows that the present women are aware of their rights in the family and society. The women do not support intercaste marriage and love marriages, which show their narrow mind about the castes in the society. Such psychology of the rural women should need to be developed. The efforts of the Government are also appreciating, as majority of the women got seed money to form Self-Help Groups. It is also noted that majority of the women respondents stated that the Village Panchayats do not interfere and solve the problems of the women effectively. Many of the women respondents agreed that the Non-Governmental Organizations are also unable to solve Sc women s problems due to some reasons already stated in the study. For this purpose, there is need for the Panchayats and Non-Governmental Organizations to look after the women empowerment activities so as to provide equal status for the women.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. There is need to increase the banking attitude of the Self-Help Group Members.
2. The emphasis on the active participation of the members in meetings of the groups is essentially needed.
3. The decision making should be developed by all the members of the Self- Help Groups.
4. Increase in attendance to the meetings of the groups on the part of members is emphasized.

5. Regular training of the members of self-help groups for undertaking income generating activities is essential. For this purpose, new small scale occupations are discovered and in which the rural women must be trained.
6. There is need to emphasis the political participation of women as only limited respondents were contested in the elections.
7. There is need to increase awareness of the Sc women in different social practices such as dowry system.
8. Based on the findings it can be that SHG are expeted to extend financial services to the poor. Sc women and contribute to the allevialtion of poverty.
9. SHG members reflect a diverse membership covering different social and economic categories , including the poor . from the one group that Sc community .
10. It seems more significant that for Sc women who have been an SHG member for seven years (or more) half (still) poor, including 13% very poor.

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