



THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Rural development is the basic need of Indian society as India is the nation of villages. Empowerment of rural women will definitely make India economically and technologically more and stronger as women are very important segment in development at local to global level.

The main obstructions of socio-economic development in Rural women are illiteracy, poverty, unequal access to resources, inadequate technical competency, lack of women extension worker, access to productive resources are critical. So for rural development it is necessary to empower rural women socially, educationally, economically, culturally, politically, technologically and psychologically.

Keywords: Rural, Women, Empowerment, Development.

Introduction:

Rural population involve women folk which is almost half of it. In rural area, agricultural and allied sector employed 89.5% of the total female labours. Women's average contribution, in overall farm output is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour. According to World Bank report, women accounted for 94% of the total employment in dairy sector. Women contributed 51% of the total employment in forest based small-scale enterprises. Around 48% self employed farmers are women and 64% of the informal sector work force depending on agriculture is women.

Since many centuries, rural women have been putting unaffordable, unbearable and inadequately paid joyless drudgery to earn for their families livelihood. The life of most rural women has been pathetic since they have to collect firewood, fetch drinking water, search fodder to feed cattle. Work on their meager land to raise crops and work as labour on other farms, take care of children etc. As many as 40% of the farmers interviewed by the National Sample Survey Organization said "they wanted to quit farming if there was another option". Annual average farmer suicides increased from 15,747 (1997-01) to 17,366 (2002-07). Agricultural policies and policies regarding marketing of agricultural product in the country and as well as in the foreign countries failed, as a result of which herd hit and sufferers are women, farmer and their children,

Rural women in our country suffer from evil conditions both economically and socially which is invisible. Economic invisibility stems from the perception that women are not relevant to the wage and self employment. But, they have been playing very important and significant role. They are engaged in a variety of occupations, small from agriculture, live stock tending,

processing of live stock produce gathering and processing of agricultural and minor forest produce, tree growing, small trading and vending producing manufactured items such as garments, bidis, shoes, food stuff etc. Still there is continued vulnerability and inequality in all sectors such as economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. There is need to empower these women to counter this menace while strengthening women's economic security. The growing realization of this fact induced several development agencies to contribute their mind in this direction and initiated several development approaches. The world conference of the UN decade for women defined development as a whole including development in the politics, social culture and growth of the human. Perhaps the women's development should not be viewed as an issue in social development but should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development. Out of several approaches prescribed for empowerment of these women the economic empowerment approach which focuses on improving women's control over material resources and strengthening women security is considered as an important approach. Here in this approach groups are formed using two methods: Organizing women around saving and credit, income generation skill training activities or organizing them by occupation or location. These groups may work in a range of areas including saving and credit, training and skill development, harnessing rural resources, new technologies or marketing as well as provide such ancillary support such as child care, health, literacy and legal aid.

The present research paper is aimed at empowering women in rural areas through income generating activities. It is an integrated

approach to train and develop women co-operative and self-help groups encompassing “rural dairy, garment making and manufacturing of food products as prime activities. According to an estimate, women represent 50% of population, make up 30 % of the official labour force, perform 60 % of all working hours, receive 10% of the world income but still own less than 1% of the world property. This is the lawful economic profile of women in the world this is also true of Indian women and very much true of rural women.

Present Status of Women in India

Statistical data of women reflects their status in India:

- **Literacy Rate:** According to census 2011, out of 74.04% of literacy rate, corresponding figures for male and female are 82.14% and 65.46% respectively and literacy rate for rural female is 58.8% as compared to urban female which is 79.9% of the population.
- **Sex Ratio:** The female to male sex ratio of population in 2011 is 940 women per 1000 men which is anomalous.
- **Child Sex Ratio:** The child sex ratio has steadily declined from 976 in 1961 to 927 in 2001 and further to 941 in 2011. This phenomenon has drawn worldwide attention and is largely attributed to the increasing practices of sex detection and selectively aborting female fetuses.
- **Nutrition, Health and Family Planning:** The average female life expectancy in India is low as compared to many countries. In rural area the girls, women and mothers face nutritional discrimination within the family.
 - ❖ The 60% of women are anemic and malnourished.
 - ❖ The maternal mortality in India is second highest in the world. The health professionals supervise only 42% of births in the country.
 - ❖ According to UNDP Human Development Report 88% of pregnant women (age 15-49yrs) were suffering from anaemia.
 - ❖ The average women in rural areas have little or no control over her potential for reproductivity. Women do not have access to safe and self controlled methods of contraception.
 - ❖ The average nutritional intake of women is 1400 calories daily. The necessary requirement is approximately 2200 calories.
- ❖ The 92% of women in India suffers from gynecological problems.
- ❖ 38% of all HIV+ people in India are women,

❖ According to UNICEF's World Children 2009 Report, 47% of Indian women aged 20-24 yrs were married before the prescribed legal age of 18 yrs in 56% of rural areas. About 40% of world child marriages took place in India.

- **Political Power:** Women's disproportionate absence from the political places would mean that concern of half of the population cannot be sufficiently attended or acted upon. Since 1952-2009 the women's representation in the parliament ranges from 4.4% to 10.1% only.
- **Gender Discrimination:** Women are overworked. Women work longer hours and their work is more arduous than men. Women's contribution to agriculture when measured in terms of the number of tasks performed and time spent is greater than men.

The extent of women contribution is aptly highlighted by macro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas which found that on a one hectare farm, a pair of bullocks works 1,064 hours a man 1,212 hours and women 3,845 hours in a year

- **Property Rights:** Most of the women are deprived of property rights. Patriarchy and social structure are the major factors in deprivation of women's' property rights. Some state initiatives and legal reforms in some states recognized it but its enforcement is questionable.
- **Inadequate Technical competency:** Though women are in operations yet they have in adequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world and this has compelled them to follow the age old practices which in turn result in poor work efficiency and drudgery.
- **Poor Existing Research and Extension:** Though several technological break-through have been observed in the recent past, the technologies by the researchers are not tailored to the specific needs of the farm women.

Women are very important segment in development at local to global levels. The main obstructions of socio-economic development in Rural women are illiteracy, poverty, unequal access to resources, inadequate technical competency, lack of women extension worker, access to productive resources are critical.

Looking to the present status of rural women it is necessary to revamp the entire approach towards rural women to cater their existing needs. Hence empowerment of rural women is the need of the day as it is surest way of making

women “partners in development” and bringing them in the mainstream of development, not only as “beneficiaries” but as “contributors”.

Empowerment of Women - Strategies & Approach:

Need of Empowerment:

There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors economics, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life.

Approaches to Empowerment of Rural Women:

1] Educational Empowerment: Education widens the individual’s mental horizon and studies confirm that female literacy has significant influence in improving social and economic status of women, enables rural women to acquire new knowledge and technology required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields.

2] Social Empowerment:

- **Status of women:**

Low status of rural women is outcome of social, cultural and economic causes. The institutional bases of women’s oppression have to be sensitized to accept the gender equality and moreover women’s perception of themselves would also need to be changed.

- **Gender Bias:** Gender analysis help us to understand the gender related issues, their diversity, intensity and interrelatedness. Thus gender is a social construct or a socially imposed identity that determines role-what can and cannot be done by men and women

- **Health and Nutrition :** Health and Nutrition are two very important basic needs for empowerment of rural women to achieve real and quicker development in health sector, “Health Education and awareness campaign” needs to be given topmost priority.

3] Economical Empowerment:

Once economic empowerment is achieved it would lead to overall development of women at large.

- **Access to resources**

Rural woman need to have ownership and control over productive assets. It will create sense of belonging which in turn will enhance the decision making ability.

- **Microcredit Programmers**

Most clients of microfinance programmers are women and empowering them especially poor women are implicit goal of these programs. The studies have revealed that microfinance

programmers have contributed significantly to women’s empowerment.

- **Collectivization :**

Bringing a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity is an important part of the strategy towards their empowerment. The coming together their worker role it also provide them an identity which is different from other identities and helps to highlight their worker role. It also provides them a sense of belonging in a totally different power equation that is mutuality. Both of these are empowering experiences in themselves. For providing support to each other, the group of women can meet periodically and there is a reference available for each group of women. For bargaining and negotiating activities like bulk buying, selling, acquisition, credit and other facilities necessary for economic activities and in this regard collectivization is an excellent instrument. This collectivization also brings in the possibility of pooling and sharing resource, skills, time, frames, space and other facilities. Pooling is an important way of strengthening the capacities of the poor women to work together and develop a sense of strength.

4] Technological Empowerment

Though women are involved in almost all agricultural operations in rural areas yet they have in adequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world,

- **Capacity Building**

It is important to develop the skills among farm women in order to increase their productivity and to keep them abreast of modernization and technological changes for being competitive in the market.

- **Exposure to Mass-media or Mediation**

There is utmost need to provide adequate coverage to the programme related to women and they must get exposure to mass-media for improving their communication and meditation skills to strength their capacity to contact and meditate with external world.

Appropriate Training Program

Training is an important component of HRD which enhances knowledge, skill and attitude.

5] Political empowerment – The role of women in politics is severely limited due to the traditional factors, such as a consideration of cast, religion and family status as a result women were left on the periphery of political process. There are too many structural and cultural odds which raised doubts about women to the village local bodies. It is very much essential to involve women in village politics and

it will possible by electing them in Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samitee.

6] Psychological empowerment –Tremendous change will be brought out by changing the psychology of women in rural areas such as their active participation in decision making, building management qualities and by improving self confidence.

7] Cultural empowerment –Most of the rural women are still engaged blindly in traditional cultural activities which keep them away from education, environment and health. It is essential to change these traditions which help women to bring awareness about saving, education, health, environment, cleanliness, family welfare and social welfare.

Conclusion:

Rural development is the basic need of Indian society as India is the nation of villages. Empowerment of rural women will definitely make India economically and technologically more and stronger.

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