

A STUDY ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL**SANTU SAMANTA¹, Dr. MANOJ KUMAR SHARMA²**

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is radically the route of increasing and progression of woman's position of mainly in financial, political, educational and social stage. Literacy and Education is considered as the main driving force of development for a nation. For improvement of women's are capable to take breaths without any fear of authoritarianism, indecision, exploitation, inequality injustice and the common thinking of abuse and violence with women in a conventionally male dominated formation. The present research work mainly focuses on the development and growth of women on the basis of education and literacy, relationship between female literacy and sex ratio district wise, growth of women on the basis of economic conditions and the different areas of working and nonworking women district wise in West Bengal.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, Female Literacy and Sex/Gender Ratio, Economic Empowerment, Correlation Statistics.

INTRODUCTION

Others have found that on average women's loan sizes are smaller than those of men, even when they are in the same credit program, the same community, and the same lending group. Some differences in loan sizes may be a result of women's greater poverty or the limited capacity of women's businesses to absorb capital. But they can also indicate broader social discrimination against women which limits the opportunities open to them, raising the question of whether microenterprise development programs should do more to address these issues. Their contributions whether setting the vision on a board of directors, designing products and services, or implementing programs are missing. Thus, as the industry becomes more sophisticated in developing targeted products and services, it makes sense to look at both targeting women and empowering women. Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15 percent. Despite the pronounced commitment of the international

community to gender equality and to the bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, there are only twelve countries where women hold 33% or more seats in the parliaments (UNDP Report, 2005). The concept of "empowerment" traces its history in the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning "to invest with authority". Thereafter, this concept was modernized to mean "to enable or permit". After 1980s, the novel concept of measuring economic development through "human development" focusing on "political empowerment" linkage with feminist discourse went a long way in shaping the idea of "women's empowerment". During 1990s economists argued that "development if not engendered, is endangered" and the major component of the global society i.e. women are left outside the purview of the fruits of development and planning, we cannot achieve the desired goal of a "developed status" of an economy, whether it is developed or developing. The United Nations has shown concern for women empowerment evident in "Millennium Development Goals" to trace the progress of women empowerment across the world. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's

empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. In addition to examining progress toward achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, the report also examined gender differentials in selected health and nutritional outcomes and evaluated differences by sex in the relationship of women's empowerment and experience of spousal violence with indicators of these selected health and nutrition outcomes. Finally, the variation in current use of modern contraception by indicators of women's empowerment and experience of spousal violence was also explored.

The impact of the patriarchal structure can be seen in rural and urban India, although women's empowerment in rural India is much less visible than in urban areas. This is of particular concern, since much of India is rural despite the high rate of urbanization and expansion of cities. Rural women, as opposed to women in urban settings, face inequality at much higher rates, and in all spheres of life. Urban women and, in particular, urban educated women enjoy relatively higher access to economic opportunities, health and education, and experience less domestic violence. Women (both urban and rural) who have some level of education have higher decision-making power in the household and the community. Furthermore, the level of women's education also has a direct

implication on maternal mortality rates, and nutrition and health indicators among children.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT-WEST BENGAL

In early 1950s in West Bengal, moderately well in urban areas however the socioeconomic position of rural women was very poor. There was no literacy and higher education also, no personal income level and early marriage was very popular in anywhere. But these scenarios turned out to be change slowly. Various programmes and schemes were taken in favour of women safety, welfare and empowerment by Government of West Bengal [4]. After 2011, Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee highlighted the great success of the 'Kanyashree Prakalpa' scheme for empowering the rural women of the state. It seeks to improve the status and well-being of girls, specifically those from socioeconomically backward families.

The main point of views is that,

- Pay some incentives to continue in education for long time and complete secondary or higher secondary education or corresponding in technical or vocational programs.
- Discouraging early and illegal marriage till at least the 18 years of age.
- The legal age of marriage for reducing the risks of early pregnancies, associated risks of maternal and child mortality and other weakening health conditions including those of undernourishment.
- It was also decided that the plan should confer more than just monetary support. It means of financial inclusion and an instrument for teenage girls empowerment.



Kanyasree Prakalpa, Government of West Bengal

Another scheme of 'Anandadhara' commenced in 2012, it was an anti-poverty programme for rural poor women, implemented all the way through organising of women into self-help



In the year 2013, 'Muktidhara'-a sustainable livelihood project was started. The major plan was to reduce the dependency of the livelihood of rural people on selling fuel wood by

groups (SHG). The main aim of this scheme was to organize the rural poor and weak people into self-managed institutions and maintain them in support of livelihood collectives (Economics Times News, October, 2018).

addressing concerns pertaining to mono-cropping practices, traditional methods of cultivation, food sufficiency of rural families, effective market linkages and seasonal migration of farmers.



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND HEALTH IN WEST BENGAL

Women empowerment may be defined to be a state of women having capability and authority to take important decisions helping community or family development. According to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Information kit – Story 5, “The empowerment and autonomy of women, and improvements in their political, social, economic and health status, are recognized as highly important ends in themselves. In addition, they are seen as essential for the achievement of sustainable development.” It may also be defined as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. It is also thought as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives or as means to gain control

over material assets and intellectual resources and ideology e.g. power to, power with and power within. The ICPD also emphasizes that education is one of the most important ways to empower women. This fact is supported by the experience from Kerala state of India, where the female literacy is nearly 88% according to 2001 Census as compared to the national figure of about 54%. Despite the per capita income of this state being lower than many other Indian states, the Infant Mortality Rate is 12 per 1000 live births; compared to the all India figure of 50 in 2009. The role of education as a tool of empowerment is also highlighted by many others, not only in Kerala but also in other communities in India. A responsive and gender-sensitive legal judicial system is another facilitator of women empowerment. This commonly addresses areas like justice in cases of domestic violence and personal assault; elimination of discrimination against women by changes in personal laws related to work, marriage,

divorce, maintenance and guardianship; and encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance by evolving consensus in order to make them gender just. Economic empowerment of women by poverty eradication, micro credits, supportive work environments; thereby leading to their financial independence, is another aspect. The rationale for economically empowering women is compelling both for its own sake (intrinsic) and for other spill over benefits (instrumental). In addition, there could various other unexplained factors. The Government, Judiciary, Mass Media and NGOs need to play a proactive role for realization of women empowerment.

Thus, women empowerment is likely to have positive outcomes like the overall development of family in children's education, health status of all the family members and environmental sanitation; even in the presence of financial constraints. Moreover, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) aims to promote gender equity and empower women through elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015. Many researchers in India tried to identify the status of women empowerment in many different communities' esp. tribal ones but all these studies are based on some aggregate indicators of education, economics, health & family welfare, participation in politics etc. What is especially lacking is a suitable, accepted/standard indicator/index of women empowerment which can be used at individual level to demarcate a woman as empowered or not. It is indeed difficult to demarcate such a

variable (say, decision-making of the woman in family matters) as a determinant or an outcome of women empowerment. There are other difficulties as empowerment is context specific and it is considered as a "process" by many, rather than a condition or state. Having mentioned all the necessities of women empowerment, one should keep in mind the opposite perspective; that is the scope of misuse of the laws and policies empowering women. For example, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is a powerful weapon to decrease injustice against women. However, there is the possibility of abuse of its provisions by leveling false charges against someone. On the other hand, in many lower socio-economic group families, women might be ignorant about such laws and hence unable to make good use when subject to violence.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: MAJOR SCHEMES OF WEST BENGAL

Except 'Kanyashree Prakalpa' Government of West Bengal has taken concerning several major initiatives for women. As a result, women have much benefitted all over the State.

- State Government's 'Sabuj Sathi' Scheme.
- 'Swabalamban' Scheme is a wide range of livelihood activities, e.g., zari craft, handloom weaving, beautician co
- Urses, community health, readymade garment-making, wood carving, etc.
- Muktir Alo' is a comprehensive scheme for the rehabilitation of sex workers.
- 'Maternity and Child Care Leave,' for a total period of two years.



Many self-help groups (SHGs) have been formed. The State has also created employment opportunities, including many for

women, through skill development in various sectors. A lot of the handicraft workers in the rural areas are women who are earning a decent livelihood. Women's participation in

MGNREGS, in which the State has achieved unique milestones, has increased to 41%, which is all-time high in the State.

DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF WOMEN ON THE BASIS OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Now recent days, the economy turned down of West Bengal is one of the most important discussion topics in Indian media. Before independence, Bengal was almost certainly for the most part of advanced region of the sub-continent. But after independence it has been changed. That time women participation rate in economic activities was very low but now it has increased. Participation of women in economic actions and activities mainly is a most important issue facilitating the economic and social empowerment of women. Just not only can service or employment, it is also a vital base of economic freedom of women. In this section we examine the work participation structure of women in West Bengal.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality and women's empowerment are two sides of the same coin. Both have multiple dimensions that together yield a wide variety of indicators. The report provides information on progress toward the twin goals of gender equality and women's empowerment; determinants of selected indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment; and, associations of women's

empowerment with selected health and nutritional outcomes. It may be concluded that women have shifted traditional assumptions about their roles and capabilities. There has been a marked change, and it has been for the better. Many of its benefits however have yet to touch the majority and all of us continue to experience various forms of gender discrimination. If laws designed to address the concerns of women are to have a dramatic and positive impact on women's lives, they must be sensitive to the social, economic and political disempowerment of women throughout the world. The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable woman to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns. 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.

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