

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AREAS: AN ANALYSIS WITH CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to have greater control over their lives and to be able to make their own decisions. This can include empowering women to participate fully in the economy and in the political process, as well as empowering them to make decisions about their own health and well-being. Women's empowerment is important because it can lead to a range of positive outcomes, including increased economic growth and development, improved health and well-being, and greater gender equality. In India, women's empowerment has been a key issue for many years. Despite some progress in recent decades, women in India continue to face significant challenges when it comes to gender equality. These challenges include discrimination, lack of access to education and employment, and gender-based violence. Apart from these challenges, women achieved in many areas and somewhere attaining their empowerment. In this point of view, present study tried to register their challenges and struggles to achieve their empowerment.

KEYWORDS: *Women Empowerment, SHGs, Gender Equality, Gender Based Violence etc*

INTRODUCTION

Women play important roles in the rural economy as farmers, wage earners and entrepreneurs. They also take responsibility for the well-being of the members of their families, including food provision and care for children and the elderly. Rural women's unpaid work, particularly in poor households, often includes collecting wood and water. Women from indigenous and grassroots communities are often also custodians of traditional knowledge, which is key for their communities' livelihoods, resilience and culture. Yet, women in rural areas face constraints in engaging in economic activities because of gender-based discrimination and social norms, disproportionate involvement in unpaid work, and unequal access to education, healthcare, property, and financial and other services. They are also disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of environmental disasters and climate change. Women are increasingly engaged in non-agricultural sectors or occupations, with positive effects on their income.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment of women means have the necessary ability to undertake a number of tasks either individually or in groups, so that they have further access to and control of society resources. Empowerment is recognized as an essential strategy to strengthen the well-being of individuals, families and communities, government and non-government agencies.

The idea of power is at the root of the term empowerment. Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways: power over, power to, power with, power within (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). The feminist movement has emphasized collective organization and has been influential in developing ideas about power within. "Power within" refers to self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how individuals can recognize through analyzing their experience, how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Therefore empowerment is about self-esteem, awareness, consciousness and confidence. It focuses participation into decision-making and challenges oppression and inequality with a bottom-up process. Empowerment reduces vulnerabilities, decreases dependency, implies action not passivity, and means being at the center, not on the periphery (Everett, 1991). It can be analyzed at individual, household and institutional level. Many income generating programs aiming towards empowerment measure their impact by looking at the improvement in the target groups mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major household decisions, relative freedom from domination within the family, political and legal awareness, involvement in political campaigning and protests. This paper tries to bring out the challenges of rural women to develop themselves and to achieve empowerment.

OBJECTIVES

- To analysis the opportunities and challenges among women for empowerment in rural areas
- To document the achieved women personalities in rural areas

METHODOLOGY

The data has been collected from rural women in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu. In this paper we adapted the qualitative approach in order to highlight the catalysis for empowerment

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1

S. Asalai is managing a canteen in Gandhigram. She was born in Dindigul. Her parents are farmer and she is from a poor family. She is a Hindu by birth. She is the fifth child and she has three elder sisters and one elder brother. She is married and blessed with two children. She has completed her Secondary School in Thambithottam Higher Secondary School and Higher secondary in Kannivadi Higher Secondary School.

She studied B.A history in MVM College Dindigul. But she was unable to complete her UG degree because of financial problems in her family. She worked as a type writing teacher in Sevika Ashram for 2 years. She has worked as a Data Entry Operator in Department of Adult Education in Gandhigram Rural Institute for 6 months. Then she worked as a type writing teacher in Chettiypatti for 5 months and Thoppampatti for 3 months. She joined a Self Help Group in 2002 as a coordinator. When she joined they had 16 SHGs only. She took charge and helped to form 56 SHGs. She has worked as incharge of three Panchayat Federations. She got minimum salary like any new worker. So, she relived from that job and joined in Gandhigram fragrant unit where she continued for few days. Then she worked as helper in Production Company (Plastic Container) at Chettiypatti. There she faced lots of problem. So, she relived from that job and stayed at home due to her family problem. She joined Kurinchi Self Help Group and started Pepped unit first, then she started "Vathal unit".

She got training in Pepped and Vathal preparation. After which she got loan from German Fund which is given from Gandhigram Trust to start on Pepped and Vathal preparation Gandhigram Trust makes use of her Food Service and in turn pays her 20 percent commission. Simultaneously she sells rice flour. First started by selling rice flour to Gandhigram staffs. She got appreciated for her quality work. Then she started supplying rice flour to small hotels in Muruganpatti and Jathigowndanpatti Villages in Dindigul district. Due to increased prices for rice and dhal and continuous power cut, she struggled to continue this business. This forced her to take a loan from Gandhigram trust. Ms.Revathi, Gandhigram Trust, appreciated her work and motivated to start a canteen. She borrowed loan from bank and started a canteen.

She is a hardworking woman with honesty and a multi furcated personality. She supplies food for Kasturba hospital patients because they wish to have food from her canteen. She is a good administrator and thus solves all problems. Initially she started her canteen with 2 workers and now 6 workers are working in the canteen. Now, she runs this business successfully.

She is an active member in AIDS- DOT and she is a good EDP trainer. Her ambition is to extend her business and provide employment opportunity for rural women. She received the Best Women Entrepreneur award on VP Anna day 2015. Her hobby is to spend time with her friends.

Case Study 2

Ponnuthai is running the Annapurana canteen in Gandhigram. She is 59 years old. Her native is Dindigul. She is from a middle class family. Her parents are farmers. She is an illiterate but she has the ability to manage a canteen. She is married and has two children. She had last her husband worked as a wire man in Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. Initially she started tea shop in Annagar, Gandhigram. She joined as a member in Annai Indhira Self Help Group. Then she borrowed loan from bank and started a canteen in the 2001. She faced more struggle to start the canteen. No one agreed to give place to start her canteen. Gandhigram trust offered a place to her for the canteen.

She is a confident and a hard working person. She started the canteen by her own with five workers. She was hot in the position to take care of her family in the absence of her husband. So, she borrowed loan from the bank and started the business. Initially she supplied food for hostel students. She was appreciated by foreigners and others for her cooking. She got Best Cook Award in Gandhigram Annual Day function. She was honored with shawl in Women's Day celebration at Dindigul. She has unique characters honesty and helping tendency. Her ambition is to sustain the business. Now, she runs the business successfully. She received Best Entrepreneur Award in Sounthrammal Day at Gandhigram. She spends time with her friends and relatives for relaxation from stress. Her hobby is watching serials.

Case Study 3

Ponnuammal, 45 years old, is the owner of cloth ironing shop. Her native is Dindigul. She got married to her aunt's son and has four children. She is an uneducated woman. She is from a middle class family. Her two sons are working in Chennai. Her parents are doing business. She is the leader of Annai Southeram Self help group. She promoted many Self Help Group (SHG). Initially she worked in piece good down at Gandhigram on the daily wage basis. She has been engaged with this cloth ironing work for the past 25 years along with her husband. The family burden falls on her when her husband falls ill. So she approaches SHG and they provided one Iron box for her business. Then she started the Iron shop and runs the business from home. Now she runs the business successfully. She gets sufficient income and fulfills her financial needs.

Basically she is very calm and active personality. She had the fear to do any work earlier but now she has developed herself. Now she is very bold and an enthusiastic women. She motivated her children and educated them. She got the best entrepreneur award on International Women Day from EKTA, Madurai on 8th march 2016. She was honored by the Gandhigram Trust on the V.P Anna annual day in 2015. She was laden with the title as “Varumaiyai Salavai Seithavar” (tWikia ryit nra;jtu;) in Kadhi Craft Day on 06.08.2012. Gandhigram provided house for her to reside. She struggled a lot to run her business. She is a courageous woman one who runs her business successfully. Her hobbies are watching movies and hearing music. Her ambition is to improve her present livelihood.

Case Study4

Mayil is the owner of Madhan Vijaya Mushroom farm. She is 42 years old and married to Mr. Perumal, a business man. She has two kids. She is from a middle class family. She completed 6th standard from Christian School, Ottanchathiram. Her father worked in Electricity board and Mother is a home maker. She used to walk 4 to 5 kms for her school. She doesn't like to go to the school because of her mathematics teacher. She got married when she was 17 years old. She took cultivated coconut trees in a contract basis and managed her business successfully. One fine morning, she heard that the training programme was organized by the Gandhigram Trust in Radio. She went and enquired about the training programme. But it was organized only for the students of Gandhigram. She is a very courageous lady. So, she went and stand outside of the training hall. She learnt how to grow the mushrooms. On 3rd day of the training programme the trainer told that the seeds of mushrooms can get in Department of Agriculture. So she got that seeds and started to produce the mushrooms. First time, she produced 150 bags of mushroom. She took that mushrooms and went to the Gandhigram trust office. She showed her mushrooms. They surprised and motivated her to produce the seeds. They taught about her seed production method. Then she started a producing seeds herself and made a mushroom farm. Initially she brought seeds and produced mushrooms. She gave the mushrooms to the trust office and received mushroom seeds. Once she learnt how to make the seeds she starting making them by herself. Before that she had a separate mushroom farm in Abhirami nagar, while she planted mushrooms in different areas. She faced so many problems to produce mushrooms. Some places the villagers were not allowed to give water for mushrooms because they need water for agriculture. So, initially she had to deal with severe loss. She mortgaged her jewels in the bank and got money to invest in mushroom cultivation. But she lost that money because of use cooperation from people. So she suffered for three years. Then she shifted to Abhirami nagar and started a mushroom farm. Now she has four seeds for mushroom cultivation. She has done this business for the past 18 years. Now she produces mushroom seeds and mushrooms. She started selling mushrooms to different vendors. Now she has eight vendors. At the same time, she got permission to put canteen in KV School, Gandhigram and she runs successfully. Now KV School wanted her to start a canteen inside the campus voluntarily but she engaged with many workers she is not able to run that canteen. She put mushroom soup stall near Gandhigram Rural Institute Railway gate. She employed seven workers in season time. Now she has two workers because of low production in the season. She struggles a lot to succeed in the business. Initially she produced more mushrooms and she sold out that mushrooms on the street. Her mother-in-law and Father-in-law were not happy about that business. Her Father-in-law had sold out his property and gave money to her husband. With that money she started mushroom business. But he was not happy. He taught she spend money unnecessarily to produce that plant. So he damaged the mushroom beds. That time she struggled for financial needs and she sold out her jewels and met her financial needs. Initially her husband helped her lot. She had taught seed production method to her husband. He brings the materials to produce seeds. He extends his full support to her.

But now her husband has involved himself in politics. So, he was not able to concentrate in mushroom farms. She manages the mushroom farms alone. Sometimes the vendors cheat her because she is a lady. They have a thought that the ladies are cheaters and they do not give respect to women. So that she struggled to sell her product in the market. She is very active and enthusiastic women. She is having too many ideas to develop her business in a broad way but she is unable to do that because of lack of man power. She gave training to students. Nearly 5000 students have been trained by her. Students from other countries visit her place. She collects Rs.500 per batch. Her aim is to promote this business in a wide-range and she wants to export this mushroom to other countries.

Case Study 5

Ms. Jeyanthi is the Managing Trustee of Vallalar Charitable Trust, Chinnalapatti, Dindigul. Her native is Aruppukottai and coming from middle class family. Her parents are expired. She did her schoolings in Devangar Girls Higher Secondary School, Aruppukottai. She completed her B. Com in Devangar Arts and Science College, Aruppukottai. She got married to Mr. Ramasamy, Astrologist and Hindu Religion Speaker and blessed with one son. Initially she worked as a teacher in Kalai Magal Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Chinnalapatti for 6 year. Then she registered Vallalar Charitable Trust on 2nd, February, 2000 under Trust Act. She is the person one who promotes ideas to start six old age homes in and around Tamil Nadu. She helped 60 orphan children for providing uniform, paying special fees for their education. Initial stage she struggled lot to run this trust. She faced financial problem and heavy competition with other NGOs etc. She runs her trust in rented building only. Now she is running the Charitable Trust with 16 orphan children in her own building. Her friends are very supportive and donated Rs. 3 lakhs for construction of new building.

She provided food, shelter and fulfill their basic needs. Periodically she arranged health camps for the children to protect from communicable and non-communicable diseases. She is monitoring the improvement of their health with periodical checkups. She also accommodated orphans from Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Now she is maintaining this orphanage with three male and 13 female orphans. If she found any psychological issues among them, she provides counseling to them. She organized games for them and it helps them to live stress free life. She did not seek any financial assistance from any other sources. She is managing with her own money. Her husband is very supportive. He advertised by word of mouth. So she received reasonable amount for maintenance of trust. Her desire is to extend her service to others and aimed to start a meditation centre for old age people. She is very much interested to plant more trees for future. She became very enthusiastic, when she spends her time with old age people. Her hobbies are reading novels and painting.

CONCLUSION

The case studies done nearby rural areas of Gandhigram, Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu to document the achieved empowered rural women. The study explains rural women can be improved through formation of self-help groups and providing various earning opportunities in rural villages. As a result that rural women empowerment could be achieved through SHG's & various earning opportunities in rural areas. Rural women play an important role in family not only family in the society, also, women pursuing so many roles i.e. lady, wife, mother lives like a role model for their children, society and world. So women have faced lot of responsibility during her life. So it is not problem for empower of women in all sector with the help of the Society.

The study observed that when the rural women empowered in all aspects like; education, employment, culture, societal, health, skill development, livelihood programmes, business development etc they improve self and improve their family members also. These developments causes for all round development of the rural women families as well as villages. This study, we conclude that the SHG's and various earning opportunities are served as a tool or techniques and way for women empowerment in all fields and sectors.

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