

Strengthening the Role of Women in Indian society by Women Empowerment

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Abstract

Women constitute around half of the total world population so as in India also. They are therefore regarded as the better half of the society. In the past, there was a great distinction between men and women. Women were overburdened with the household responsibilities; their capabilities were under estimated and were not given any chance to walk out for performing any kind of task. Women are generally presumed to be weak, passive, dependent and people oriented whereas, men are considered strong, aggressive, independent and things oriented. Assumptions became reality when society prepares males and females for performance in presumed roles. In several developing countries, marriage is the only career for most women. Women have combined their activities to selected professions like education, nursing, medicine and office work. Very few women enter professions like industry, engineering, trade etc. for centuries women have been victim of social prejudice discrimination. From the past 10 to 15 years, to strengthen to women by their empowerment have been explicitly recognized as key not only to the health of nations, but also to social and economic development.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Women Entrepreneur effect on child immunization, empowerment by technology.*

Introduction

In the changed scenario, awareness has motivated women to start their own enterprises and contribute to the family income. Now there is growing awareness among women that entrepreneurship opens up new fields for them and they can achieve their cherished profession which has independence and self support.

Due to the awakening and desire for economic independence among women all over the world, a large number of women entrepreneurs have appeared on the map of entrepreneurship. The success of most of the women entrepreneurs underlines the fact that entrepreneurship is the best career choice for women. There is no assistance for them from the government and

non-government organizations that are willing to encourage women to be self employed, by offering training program consultancy services and guidance. Women are considered more hard-working in comparison to men. They have got more creative skills and employ innovative ideas in the work area.

Most of the women are indulging in the entrepreneurial scenario due to the awakening and her desire for economic independence. This is getting popularized among women all over the world including India, a large number of women entrepreneur has appeared on the map of entrepreneurship. The success of women entrepreneurs in the current scenario is the result of the fact that entrepreneurship is the fine career choice for women. The Central Statistical Organization (CSO) survey of manufacturing enterprises (2006-07) showed that out of the total 3.50 million proprietary units owned by women entrepreneurs 2.75 million (78%) and 0.49 million of units were located in rural and urban areas respectively. This survey also pointed out that women entrepreneurs have been undertaking activities in almost all industry groups and units concentrated in units of beverages, tobacco and its products, garments, wood products, cotton textiles and food products.

Since gender inequality and women's disempowerment occur in all the different domains in which women and men interact and function, both concepts are multi-dimensional; consequently, they give rise to a large number of potential indicators. Indicators of gender equality/inequality are typically designed to compare the status of women and men on particular characteristics of interest; whereas, by definition, indicators of empowerment/disempowerment tend not to be relative. Instead, indicators of empowerment are designed to measure roles, attitudes, and rights of women and sometimes men.

In urban areas they have better area of work in capital intensive industries like paper and its

products, leather products, rubber products, chemical products machinery and transport equipments. Entrepreneurship is a kind of profession which gives lots of space to women for developing self-respect and dignity of their own and family as well. This is the profession of high elasticity which can never ever be overcrowded in large country like ours. In this profession a women can prove that she is capable in managing finances which is vital for the success of an entrepreneur. A women can perform her work in the best way when she doesn't have pressure and time restrictions on her mind and this is possible only in entrepreneurship and their urge to defeat man can be satisfied only here in this profession.

Defining Entrepreneur / Entrepreneurs

An entrepreneur is one of the most important segments of economic growth. They are the ones who have shown that genius is sweat and toil and sacrifice and that natural resources gain value only by the ingenuity and labour of man.⁶ Basically, an entrepreneur is a person who is responsible for setting up a business or an enterprise. In fact, he is one who has the initiative, skill for innovation and who looks for high achievements. He is a catalytic agent of change and works for the good of people. He puts up new green field projects that actually creates wealth, opens up employment opportunities and fosters other sectors. The entrepreneur is now a critical factor in the socio-economic change and a key man who envisages new techniques, new line of production, new products and co-ordinates all other activities.

Women as Entrepreneurs and Status of women

'Freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political. If a woman is not economically free and self-earning, she will have to depend on her husband or someone else, and dependents are never free'. These were the ideas of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India, which vividly highlight the importance of economic independence of women. These views are antagonistic to the laws of Manu written much early either before or during the Christian era which stress the need to control women because of the 'evils' of female

character. Women were the first human beings to taste bondage. She was treated as a slave before the slavery system existed. Her inferiority can largely be attributed to her sexual peculiarities. Man has always played the role of Lord. Since long she has been treated as an object of lust, slavery and exchange. So much so that even the Ten Commandments are addressed only to man and the tenth commandment refers to woman along with servants and domestic animals. This prejudice is visible in the older regions of the world too. Almost all religions preach that women is unclean and impure, the greatest sinner of the world, one who has caused the "downfall" of man.²¹ Plato, the Greek Philosopher, went to the extent of saying that he was fortunate for not having been born as a woman. On the other hand history also records that women in Vedic age have played an important part in religious and social functions. The position of a wife was an honored one as no religious ceremony could be performed by the husband alone. The Third Millennium B.C. Harappan and Mohanjodaro culture indicates that Indian women enjoyed a comparatively high status which surpassed that of contemporary civilization in ancient Greek, Mesopotamia or Egypt.

The emergence of women on the economic scene as entrepreneurs is a significant development in the emancipation of women and securing them a place in the society, which they have all along deserved. The hidden entrepreneurial potentials of women have gradually been changing with the growing sensitivity to the role and economic status in the society. In recent time, our women are increasingly becoming conscious of their existence, their rights and their work situations. And yet, the women from middle class strata have accepted their role and are not often ready to alter for fear of a social backlash. Today, women entrepreneurs represent groups of women who have broken away from the beaten track and are exploring new avenues of economic participation. Among the reasons for women to run organized enterprises are their own confidence and faith in their own skill and knowledge and talents with a compelling desire of wanting to do something positive. What makes their arrival as well as achievements even more significant and commendable are the struggles they have to put up, frustrations they have to experience and the multiple handicaps they have to overcome to emerge as entrepreneurs at the early stage and subsequently

to achieve success in business at a later stage by managing and running their enterprises.

A woman is often described as the better half of man. But the actual condition of women in the world does not tally with this description. Women have not achieved equality with men. Of the world's 1.4 billion poor people it is estimated that nearly 70 percent are women. Between 75 and 80 percent of the world's 30 million refugees are women and children. Educational backwardness is a major reason of women in lagging behind men. Of the world's one billion illiterate adults, two-third are women. Two-third of the 150 million children world-wide who are not in schools are girls.²²

"When women move forward, the family moves, the village moves". These words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru are often repeated because it is an accepted fact, that only when women are in the main stream of progress, only then any economic and social development can be meaningful.

Although a lot has been done to ameliorate the condition of woman kind International Women's Day which falls on March 8 reminds us every year that much more needs to be done to ensure a better deal for the female half of the humanity. The fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995, resulted in agreement by 189 delegations on a five year plan to enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women to improve their health, advance their education and promote their reproductive rights. Over 100 countries have announced new incentives to further the advancement of women as a result of Beijing Conference. The 1979 UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination among women, often described as the Bill of Rights of women, has been accepted by 154 countries.

Economically, although women have been making progress, still men enjoy a larger share of the cake. The majority of women earn on an average about three-fourth of the pay of males for the same work, outside the agricultural sector, in both developed and developing countries. In most countries, women work approximately twice of the male labours' work. Women make up 31 percent of the official labour force in developing countries and 47 percent of the world-wide level. Rural women produce more than 55 percent of all food grown in developing countries. The value of women's unpaid housework and community work is

estimated at between 10 percent and 35 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) world-wide, amounting to \$12 trillion in 1996. Women hold 11 percent of the seats in world's parliaments. The percentage of female cabinet ministers world-wide has more than doubled in the last decade, from 3.4 in 1988 to 7.00 in 1998. Women hold 35 percent of professional posts in the United Nations Secretariat including 18 percent in senior management positions.

One of the recent issues of economic importance is that of women in business. In India, although women constitute approximately 50 percent of the total population, the entrepreneurial world is still a male dominated one. Though, of course, the percentage of business women is on the increase.

The world celebrated the International year of the women in 1985, and the decade of 1980's witnessed the emergence of a large number of organizations fighting for the cause of women. Scholars and researchers are increasingly drawn to women's issues; a large body of literates has developed around gender-related themes. Promotion of women-owned businesses and other related inputs are some of the efforts which need to be understood and appreciated in the wider perspective of women catching up with men in various walks of life.

At the dawn of the International Year of Women, the then Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi spoke firmly, 'Since times immemorial, woman has been discussed, and written about mainly as a decorative object. But when she has stepped out of this niche, by and large, the response has been one of cynicism and derision. Women's liberation is not a luxury for India, but an urgent necessity to enable the nation to move ahead to a life which is more than satisfying materially, intellectually and spiritually'.

In India, from the very beginning women have been managers of the kitchen and have solely dominated the area of household activities. So deep has been the impact of this, that the general attitude of the people about women entrepreneurs is that they are makers of 3P's pickles, powder (spices), papads and other household goods. Today, non-traditional enterprises are easily managed by women makers. They are flourishing well as loading consultants, publishers, exporters of garments, designers, interior decorators and the like.

The advent of the media and the increasing awareness among a big chunk of

women in particular and the society in general is providing a boost to their understanding of the changing concepts of life. The woman has stepped out of her niche and is in the field to compete with man. She is well versed and fully equipped to fight all hurdles in her path to the top. Even if most business women could not make it to the Fortune 500 list, one can't deny the ones who have shattered the glass ceilings to find their place in the sun whether owners or top-notch executives.

Nancy Reagan, the wife of former US President, has rightly quoted, "A woman is like a teabag-you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water". And it is perhaps in the world of entrepreneurship that the recognition and value of women's contribution is the most vital to the making of a better tomorrow.

With the spread of education and the new awareness, women entrepreneurs are spreading their wings to higher levels of the 3 E's namely engineering, electronics and energy though the number of such units is not as large as it should be. But the very fact that women are putting up units, to manufacture solar cookers in Gujrat, small foundries in Maharashtra and TV capacitors in the industrially background area of Orissa, shows that women if trained and given opportunities can venture in non-traditional industries. Even the so-called socially tabooed industrial activity of wine making and selling is being done by women entrepreneurs in Bombay.²⁴ So today no field is unapproachable to the trained and determined modern Indian women.

The effects of women's empowerment indicators on child immunization

A logistic regression was run for all children age 12-23 months to see whether, controlling for education, wealth, and residence, the odds of children being fully immunized varied by their sex. The regression analysis (data not shown) shows that the odds that a girl will be fully immunized are 66% as high as the odds that a boy will be fully immunized. As expected, full immunization increases for all children with wealth and with mothers' education.

Logistic regressions were also run separately for girls and boys age 12-23 months to determine whether mothers' empowerment and experience of spousal violence have a direct and differential association with their likelihood of being fully immunized. The regressions controlled for

mother's education, residence, household wealth, birth order, and presence of older same sex sibling.

The regression analysis found that none of the indicators of employment, decision making, and experience of violence had a significant direct effect, except for the mother having a say in the use of her husband's earnings. This women's empowerment indicator was significant for girls but not for boys. Girls whose mothers made decisions jointly on the use of their husbands' earnings were only 36% as likely (OR=0.36) to be fully immunized as those whose mothers made these decisions mainly alone (OR=1.00). The odds ratio was also significantly lower for girls whose mothers' did not have a main say, alone or jointly, in these decisions (OR=0.30).

Additionally, the odds ratios for full immunization if the mother has 12 or more years of education are higher for girls than for boys (OR for girls=9.73 vs. OR for boys=6.68). (Detailed results not shown)

This analysis shows that girls are indeed disadvantaged relative to boys in their access to full immunization. Having a mother who is educated increases the likelihood of children being immunized; it also has additional benefits for girls relative to boys if the mother is highly educated. Girls are also benefited, net of the effects of mothers' education and household wealth, when their mothers' have a major say in their husbands' earnings.

Methodologies used

Drawing on Shapiro (1988), Wadsworth (1997) and others, a participatory feminist evaluation methodology was developed to critically evaluate the project's methods and activities. This was based on a praxis feminist framework that aimed to give voice to, and validate the needs, values and experiences of the participants. The evaluation included a rigorous analysis of how well the project's methods and activities met the diverse needs of the participants, and met the aims of empowering women and including a diversity of women. Multiple research methods were used, including:

Participant observations of project activities such as workshops and online conversation groups.

In depth, semi-structured, individual interviews with twenty-six participants and project stakeholders comprising thirteen participants (all women), six research team members (four

women and two men), and seven industry partner representatives (five women and two men). Of these interviewees, nine participants, five research team members and three industry partners took part in the project's online groups. Of the community interviewees who participated in the online groups, eleven had also taken part in workshops, or workshops plus other project activities, while six participated in the project via the online groups only.

Two focus group interviews conducted via audio conference with five participants in each (nine rural and one urban). Eight of the participants were online group members.

Analysis of diaries kept by six participants in the project's small online group 'wechat'.

Analysis of selected email messages sent to the online groups.

Workshop feedback questionnaires that provided qualitative and quantitative data.

Statistical analysis of demographic and personal background information provided by workshop and online group participants.

The qualitative data analysis program NUD*IST was used to code and analyze all of the focus group and interview data, while statistical analysis of questionnaire data was undertaken using the SPSS program. The validation process included triangulation of the various data collected and the use of multiple analytical strategies and methods. Feedback on some of the analysis was also obtained from selected participants.

During individual and focus group interviews, the participants, research team members and industry partners provided definitions of the concept 'empowerment'. Together with relevant literature on empowerment and the results of the analysis, this data was used to develop a model of rural women's empowerment.



Source: Household Surveys
 *Official estimates for national non-immigrant population

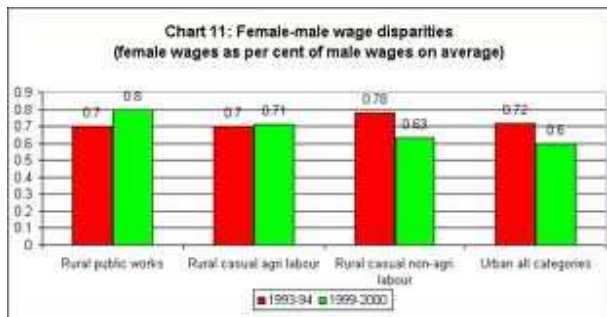
Friedmann's Methods of empowerment

Friedmann's (1992) alternative development and empowerment model provided a useful framework for the analysis. This model of empowerment involves local self-reliance, direct participatory democracy and experimental social learning. Friedmann's view that empowerment cannot be conferred by external agents is similar to that of Claridge (1996) and Lather (1991), whose work was also drawn on. However, he suggests that such agents can play a role in providing 'support in ways that encourage the disempowered to free themselves of traditional dependency' (Friedmann, 1992: 77).

Taking the perspective of people in households, Friedmann argues that they potentially have access to three kinds of power: social, political and psychological. 'Social power' requires 'access to certain "bases" of household production such as information, knowledge and skills, participation in social organisations, and financial resources' (Friedmann, 1992: 33). This form of empowerment therefore includes key features of social capital, which has been identified as an essential element of sustainable rural community development (Harrison, 1998; Simpson et al, 2001).

The concept of 'political power' includes access to the process by which decisions are made, particularly those that affect people's own future. It also includes the power to vote, as well as the power of voice and collective action (Friedmann, 1992: 33). Friedmann suggests that this requires a prior process of social empowerment to enable effective participation.

Psychological power is defined by Friedmann as an individual sense of potential-ness which is demonstrated in self-confident behaviour that often results from successful action in the social or political domains, although 'it may also result from intersubjective work' (Friedmann, 1992: 33). Several researchers have identified self-confidence and self-esteem as essential 'first



steps' to empowerment (Anderson, 1996; Claridge, 1996). Feelings of greater individual control are another important aspect of psychological empowerment (Anderson, 1996). All three kinds of empowerment are seen by Friedmann as relevant to women's struggles and form an interconnecting triad. Friedmann (1992: 116) suggests that 'when this triad, centred on an individual woman and household, is linked up with others, the result is a social network of empowering relations that, because it is mutually reinforcing, has extraordinary potential for social change.

Although somewhat idealistic, Friedmann's framework of empowerment is useful because it suggests that empowerment and social change is a multidimensional process which requires analysis at the micro and macro levels of the individual and the community, organisation or group, and the interrelationships between them shown. It also highlights the power and value of Australian rural women's networking activities that have been successful in generating action and change (Grace and Lennie, 1998). Networking was an important component of the online conversation groups established as part of the Rural Women and ICTs project. These online groups connected the rural participants with the QUT research team and women working in relatively powerful positions in government and industry, thus potentially facilitating political empowerment.

Empowerment by Technology

The various meanings that the interviewees in the study gave to empowerment and other indicators of the empowering effects of the project could be readily coded in Friedmann's categories of social, political and psychological empowerment. However, author's analysis identified an important fourth form of empowerment that was labelled 'technological empowerment'. Like social empowerment, this form of empowerment also requires access to information, knowledge, skills and resources.

Feminists such as Arnold and Faulkner (1985) and Wajcman (1991) argue that an important factor in women's empowerment is the development of knowledge and skills that enhance their technical competence and expertise. As Wajcman (1991: 165) points out: "Technical competence is certainly not the only source of male power, but it is an important one,

especially in relation to women". Given the technological focus of the Rural Women and ICTs project, several of the meanings of empowerment provided by the interviewees referred to confidence and competence in using technologies, and the benefits to women from using new ICTs. It can be argued that, with the increasing use of the Internet to access government information and to lobby and organise campaigns on important social, economic and environmental issues, technological empowerment is an important new prerequisite to political empowerment.

Conclusion

The main concern of this Paper is to check the efforts to strengthen the women in India by the National Family Health Surveys which are of 92-93 and 98-99. The specific areas investigated included son preference, education, age at marriage, spousal age differentials, employment, female household headship, women's access to resources, gender relations in the household, women's participation in decision making, and spousal violence. In addition to examining progress toward achieving 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.

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