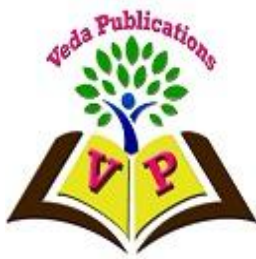RESEARCH ARTICLE

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POVERTY ALLEVIATION: A SOCIO CULTURAL AND POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment is one of the concerns of international community. This concern is manifested in the formulation of Millennium Development Goals. The third of these goals is related to women empowerment i.e. to promote gender equality and empower women. Poverty is one of the major reasons of women's disempowerment. Different micro and macro level strategies are being used by government agencies and NGOs for poverty alleviation of women as a way to empower them. Empowerment is the phenomenon of nineties and is defined as giving power to creating power within' and 'enabling'. It is a multi-dimensional process, which enables individuals and groups to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.The study will explore to what extent women's empowerment is related to NGOs' poverty alleviation programs in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords*: Women's Empowerment, Ngos, Poverty, Alleviation.*

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is one of the concerns of international community. This concern is manifested in the formulation of Millennium Development Goals. The third of these goals is related to women empowerment i.e. to promote gender equality and empower women. Poverty is one of the major reasons of women's disempowerment. Different micro and macro level strategies are being used by government agencies and NGOs for poverty alleviation of women as a way to empower them. Empowerment is the phenomenon of nineties and is defined as giving power to creating power within' and 'enabling'. It is a multi-dimensional process, which enables individuals and groups to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. The term became popular in the field of development especially with reference to women. The empowerment theme runs strongly through all the Third World countries, especially in the context of women. Most of the modem democracies and developing nations have a public agenda for the process of empowerment of women. The empowerment has become key solution to many social problems like high population growth, environmental degradation and low status of women. Gender asymmetry is a universal phenomenon. This gender inequality is reflected in the famous formulation of the U.N. Decade for Women: "While women account for half of the world's population, perform two-thirds of its work, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one hundredth of the world's property". Also, most of the world's poor are women. According to the Human Development Report (1995)', "Poverty has women's face. Of 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 per cent are women. Economic and political dimensions and is incomplete without developing the women who constitute about 50 per cent of the population. Women's role in development is an indispensable factor. Community Development is incomplete without women's participation and contribution. But women are not involved in the process of developmental activities, which are affecting their lives. The concept of women's empowerment is increasingly used to understand what is needed to change the condition of poor, vulnerable and powerless women. The situation of women particularly in the third world and the developing countries does not seem to be very encouraging. They have fewer opportunities and less choice in making decisions of their lives. There are many reasons for disempowerment of women in developing countries. One of the major reasons is poverty.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

1. To understand the different levels of empowerment of women involved in the SHGs.
2. To explore the perceptions of women about contextualization of empowerment.
3. To study the socio economic profile of women Self Help Groups.
4. The study will explore to what extent women's empowerment is related to NGOs' poverty alleviation programs in Andhra Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature and is based on library research. I draw upon theoretical literature mainly to analyze the concepts of empowerment and poverty alleviation and also i collected from journals articles news papers in library.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Empowerment literally means 'becoming powerful'. The Dictionary of Social Work defines empowerment theory as 'theory concerned with how people may gain collective control over their lives, so as to achieve their interests as a group and a method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack itY'.E empowerment can refer to user participation in-services and to the self-help movement generally, in which groups take action on their own behalf, either in cooperation with, or independently of, the statutory services' (Thomas and Pierson, 1995)'.

2. Acosta-Belen and Bose (1990)~ sees empowerment as a battle forpower against all factors which perpetuate the structural subordination of women and treat women as "the last colony-The global capitalist system, cultural praxis, religion, education and other social institutions. Bookman androgen (198814 are of the opinion that the 'empowerment begins when they(poor women) change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness recognize the systemic forces that oppress them and. .. act to change the conditions of their lives.

3. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action (Karl, 1995)Em -powerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power.

Thomas and Pierson, **(1995), Dictionary of Social Work, London, Collins International.**

Results and Discussion

Table-1

Age group of SHG members

S .NO	Age Groups	Number of women
1	Bellow 20 years	30
2	20-30 years	68
3	30-40 years	42
4	Above 40 years	10

Source: primary data

The Table No.2 revels that the average age group of the women is 20-30 and 30-40 years which indicates that the most of the women get engaged in self-help groups to attain their empowerment.

Literacy and illiteracy level among the women

Table-2

S.NO.	Literate/ Illiterate	Number of women
1	literate	52
2	Illiterate	98

Source: primary data

The Table No.2 shows that the literacy rate among these women is very poor it is just 52 among 150 selected samples. Then also illiterate women earning their livelihood though self-help group activities.

STATUS OF WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT MOVEMENT IN INDIA

Women in ancient India, particularly during the Vedic period enjoyed a position which was on the whole much more satisfactory than in the later periods. Women underwent almost a kind of servitude during the medival period and their position went improving during the British period and after independence. Today Indian women are almost assigned an equal status with men. All their political, economic and educational and other disabilities have been removed legally. This does not, however mean those Indian women are completely free from problems. They have their own problems. The status accorded to women in society symbolizes its level of progress. The spirit of civilization can be assessed by the way in which women are treated by the members of that civilization. Study of the history of human society reveals that in no society of the world women enjoyed absolute equality on par with men. Every where they were subject to inequality, discrimination and exploitation. In some societies their position has been comparatively better than their counterpart in some other societies. Even in the same society the status accorded to women has never been the same all through. It has been changing in keeping with the changes in the general conditions of the society. The status of women in India has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes exploitation of women to a greater extent was reduced. Problem of violence against women is universal and women are becoming victims of violence leading to increasing crimes against women. Exploitation and harassment of women is common. They have number of health problems, discrimination of girl child education, leading to illiteracy, problem of unemployment, poverty etc.

EMPOWERMENT MOVEMENT IN INDIA THROUGH WOMEN ORGANIGATION

The role of the State and institutions, actors of civil society, voluntary organizations, academicians, social activists and many more is remarkable in the Indian Women's Movement to make sure that women are empowered and autonomous to perform the tasks of their own choice. The women's movement in India has been essentially a voluntary effort initiated, organized and directed by NGOs.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment has also been viewed and discussed in terms of individual/personal development and collective thinking as a group. According to Moser (1989: 1815) empowerment is the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and non-material resources". Moser's focus on self-reliance and internal strength emphasizes the significance of the individual. However, Moser (1993) in explaining her view of empowerment does

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recognize that economic empowerment is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to address gender inequalities. She (1989) proposes transformation of all the structures of subordination from family to state and global levels.

THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The need for political empowerment of women becomes more significant in a development context where 'power within' cannot be much beneficial until women are not strong and empowered from political point of view. Friedman (1992: 32-34) conceived power in three forms: social power, political power and psychological power. The psychological power or individual's power results from developments in social and political power. Social power is meant to include skills and knowledge that at household level enhances production as well as provides bases for political power. Political power in turn is understood as a mechanism to influence policies that determine micro and macro structures and process. According to Friedman (1992) political power could be influenced from collective action. His notion of psychological power is similar to Kabeer's (1999) and Rowlands' (1997, 1999) conception of 'power within' and hence, it would include individual attributes of self-reliance and self-esteem. Friedman (1992) promotes the strategy of collective social power that can influence political power in the form of influencing social policies. Once the political process of policy making and legal structures are influenced it would translate into personal empowerment or (in Friedman's terminology) psychological power.

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As the concept of empowerment has various meanings, the concept of gender in development literature is also subject to multiple meanings. It is due to differences in conceptualizations. Differences manifest because of different ideologies and values systems in organizations: for example, the World Bank is economic focused, Action Aid and other such organizations have a rights based approach (Warren, 2007: 189). However, in an attempt to put together the commonly agreed assumptions in GAD discourse, I may summarize its distinctive features.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted in 10 SHGs from government and NGOs-run SHGs.The block wherein the study was conducted was selected on the basis of proportionate number of SHGs both by government and NGOs. It is seen that the SHG revolution has been more geared by the former while the SHGs run by the NGOs have not been effective. This is because of the fact that NGOs are more focused on generation of profit. The profit is generated from the interest of the loans taken by the members to invest in some· kind of enterprise. This is done by the NGOs to meet the needs of maintenance of the office, payment to officials, conveyance etc. It is a really a challenging task to define the term 'empowerment'. The term may imply differential meanings for individuals dwelling in diverse social conditions. Situations wherein the basic living conditions are not met, empowerment for the individuals may be perceived as right to shelter. Food. Clothing. Health care. And when these are met. Then aspects important. But it can be rightly said that empowerment involves the right to decision-making and power of autonomy. When an individual is able to decide about

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his/her own life as per the situation slab dwells in, then that particular individual can be said to be empowered. However. the concept of empowerment is subjective in nature.

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