

## **Problems and Prospects of Women Empowerment in Rural Areas With special reference to Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu.**

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**ABSTRACT:** Proper assessment and exact evaluation of socio-economic factors which influence the women empowerment in the rural areas are the main objectives in this study. The primary data have been collected from 100 respondents from Sivaganga district of TamilNadu. The result of the research shows that educational level holds the key to unlock the avenues of women empowerment in rural areas. It naturally leads to the indispensable conclusion that focus is to be laid on accessibility of these rural women to the corridors of higher education which alone ensures their economic independence through employment which in turn paves the way for their enforcement. The beneficiary of this process is undoubted the nation itself for it enters into a stage of speedy economic growth and sustainable development.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Gender Discrimination, Sustainable Development, Women Education and Rural Development.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

In rural areas even today it is difficult, if not impossible, for the woman to decide the course of their life to have a choice of their career, spouse and even dresses. When women constitute equal half of the society, they should contribute their mite for the upliftment of self, Welfare of the society as development of the nation. It is better to remember that a bird cannot fly high with one wing. It is time with society too. The efforts of men alone, however strenuous and selfless maybe, would not suffice for the overall development of the country. In this context it became absolutely necessary and essential to have an in-depth study of women empowerment in rural areas.

Ideally speaking the women, as an equal half of the society has to play in equal role in the development of self-well-being of the family, welfare of the society and sustainable development of the nation. But in practice it was not so. Though men were finally aware of the fact that a bird cannot fly with one wing, they kept women under subjugation for centuries. The heavy feat of the male chauvinistic and the male dominated society brutally refused to give the justifiable rights to the women. In the past, women were thus forced to be passive and mutespectators in the familial and societal gathering and not active participants in the activities undertaken for the development of advancement of family / society / country. But things are totally changed today. Thanks to the liveless, ceaseless and selfless services of the leaders and social reformers from time to time. Women today enjoy the triple freedom of thought, word and action. The opening of the corridors of higher education for women unlocked the portals of freedom for them. Education gave them enlightenment and employment which sowed in them the seeds of self-confidence; the employment gave them economic independence which ensured their self-reliance. The combination of these two major factors namely self-confidence and self-reliance led them to the attainment of their life's ambition namely women emancipation through empowerment. Though women empowerment ostensibly or strongly found in many areas, it's not upto the expectations and standard in rural areas. Also in the field of entrepreneurship they are lagging behind, hence this study.

### **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Duflo (2012) observes in detail, the economic and sustainable development is closely related to women empowerment. The benefits of women empowerment, according to him, are manifold. At the individual level, it originates and sustains self-confidence and self-reliance in women; in the familial level, she plays a pivotal role not only in the welfare and education of the children but also in upholding domestic harmony; in the society

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level, it eliminates gender discrimination and above all in the national level, it strengthens the solid foundation economic and sustainable development.

Entrepreneurship is one of the main archives that lead to women empowerment. The inherent willpower, self-confidence, intellectual sharpness and mental agility are necessary and required assets to make the women successful entrepreneurs. It is forefend that more than three fourth of women are economically medium positioned half of whom are engaged in business with low risk and responsibility (Jaiswal et.al, 2014).

Nethravathi [2014] points that indefatigable courage of women has embolden them to break open the age old confinement of four walled houses and their metamorphosis from mute and passive spectators into active participants in the familial / societal / national activities has been duly recognized as a result of which they are assigned positions in entrepreneurship which are hither to the exclusive property of males and their entry into business world has positively profited the national economy as it is kept active and vibrant.

Reddy [2014] praises is the role of these women entrepreneurs in spreading the spirit of freedom among women. Besides being self-employed themselves, they generate employment opportunities to other women too, to make them economically independent which is the first step towards women emancipation just like a candle which lights other candles to spread light these women are not satisfied with themselves alone empowered. They extend a helping hand to the lives of them to advice in life.

Ayyappadas [2016] enumerates the problem faced by women entrepreneurs. The chief and most troublesome of which is the marketing problem, where men play a dominant role. Particularly, the rural women are worsthit though they possess indigenou knowledge, talent, potential and resources. But they are bountifully deprived of the legitimate and justifiable opportunity to prove their mettle. The proper choices of business, lack of technical skill and absence of training programs and other problems for women entrepreneurs.

According to Manisha and Frehama [2014] elimination of gender discrimination through women empowerment is not a national phenomenon but a global one. Endorsing this view Vike and Kale 2014 proceeds further and assert that the increased frequency and magnitude of participation in the modern technology based entrepreneurship world ensure sustainable development of national economy. Citing the examples from other countries includes the developednations.

#### **RESEARCH GAP:**

No doubt there are many studies and articles highlighting problems of women in general and rural women in particular. But most of them are of theoretical point of view focusing on gender inequality, harassment and sexual exploitation. But there are many more problems of rural women to probe both revealed and hidden. Comparatively it is not so easy for rural women to break the shell in the name of tradition, culture, religious edicts, casteism, male chauvinism and the like. Whereas a city woman finds it easy to break the barriers and rise in the societal ladder her rural counterpart lags far behind. Besides these hidden factors there are obvious factors namely economic dependence and familialties which add fuel to fire in the woeful life of rural women. The shackles around her ankles are too tight and strong for her to break them. Hence her ambition of standing on her own legs remains still an mirage. It is these factors that motivated these researchers to undertake an in-depth study to various socio-economic conditions which affect the emancipation of rural women to empowerment.

#### **NEED FOR THE STUDY:**

Since independence Government of India as well as State Governments has been well aware of precarious condition of women, especially of rural women who are mercilessly treated as non-entity. Brutal denial of their legitimate and justifiable rights to have a choice of their own education, marriage, lifestyle and even dress-code makes the life a rural woman pathetic. In order to free those from invisible but unbreakable bondage the Governments both at the Center and the States have been implementing very many welfare schemes. The sole objective of these schemes in women empowerment, through the bill of reservation for women reforms in Assemblies and Parliament have been shelved for more than 3 decades, the reservation for women in educational and employment opportunities is certainly a boon for them. Right to Education, Right to Property, Prevention of Domestic Violence Act are some other measures introduced and implemented by the Governments for the upliftment of rural women. Under these circumstances this study attempts to examine the pros and cons of the socio-economic problems which act as both the cause and remedy of women's problems. The findings of this study will, it is hoped, benefit the stakeholders, policy makers, the implementing agencies both at government and non-governmental level in the resounding success of their strenuous efforts.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- a) To study the socio-economic background of rural women.
- b) To examine the problem which positively impact and adversely affect empowerment of rural women in India with focus on Sivaganga District.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**

- a) As this is confined to the rural women of Sivaganga District, Tamil Nadu the findings may not be generalized.
- b) As this study concentrates only on the socio-economic factors associated with the women empowerment in India, the same scale may not be used to measure other factors.

#### **III. METHODOLOGY:**

This study is based on both primary and secondary data the former of which were collected from 100 respondents of Sivaganga District through a well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included the details of all socio-economic variables name, age, income, size and type of family, marital status, religion, community, caste, status in the family / society, role played in decision making and others. This questionnaire was designed and drafted on the basis of previous studies, articles, papers pertaining to the subject chosen for the study. After a pilot study, the questionnaire was revised and modified in consultation with experts in the field and final well-structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents. Each question in the questionnaire was clearly explained in Tamil for a perfect and clear understanding of the less educated and the illiterates. Secondary data were collected through the necessary and relevant articles, essays from the magazines, journals of national and international repute and from government reports and dissertation, thesis. The collected data were codified and subjected to a microscopic analysis with help of SPSS and AMOS Software. The major findings of the study are presented in the following section.

#### **IV. FINDINGS**

##### **❖ Socio-Economic Conditions of the Rural Women:**

It remains a regrettable but irrefutable fact that even after 7 decades of Independence that pathetic plight of the rural women remains the same particularly in its social variables which is the major stumbling block in their march towards upliftment, leave alone empowerment. In education, for example, a negligible 6% have completed their post-graduation while 14% have completed graduation. One third of the rural women have studied upto SSLC / Higher Secondary. That clearly indicates that nearly half of the rural women in this study area have never entered into the corridors of even primary education. It is this illiteracy that adversely affects their advancement in life.

In the realm of religion / caste a vast majority of women follow Hinduism while other religions namely Islam and Christianity have just a few followers in the study area. Though most of them belong to one and the same religion, Hinduism they are divided on the basis of casteism. They are almost equal in number in the three major categories namely MBC / BC / SC. It is surprising as well as shocking to note these ruralities are infected with the urban culture of encouraging and promoting the nuclear family system. Gone the days when the villages were celebrated for upholding the Joint Family System. But today even in villages nuclear families out number Joint Families. In this sphere of employment, two thirds of women populations in the villages are engaged in agricultural and allied activities while just 10% are self-employed. They run pretty shops, tea shops, milk booths and the like. Others are docile home makers who never leave their houses at all.

##### **❖ Rural Women's Involvement in Familial Affairs:**

As a male dominated Society India has been patriarchal society from Pre-historic period. Men used to play the dominant role of bread-winning family women were forced to remain indoors to take care of men in the kitchen and bedroom. The spirit of enslavement running to the veins of rural women for ages does not allow them even today to take a decision in their own matters, not speak of other things. Most of the rural women forcibly made or voluntarily become mute spectators of happenings around them whether or not those happenings affect them. Active participation in the gatherings of family / society still remains a dream to be translated into reality. At the maximum the only freedom that the rural women enjoy today is in their choice of clothes. In all other matters related to the running of the family, children's education / employment / marriage the men folk of the house take their reigns. To put in a nutshell, the rural woman is still subservient to man.

#### **V. RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – SUGGESTIONS:-**

The findings of the study clearly show the direction of the forward movement towards women empowerment. It is found that illiteracy is root cause of marginalization, suppression, oppression and exploitation of rural women. The previous studies and the experiences urban women make it crystal clear that economic Independence holds the key to women empowerment, be she a ruralite or urbanite and economic Independence is ensured through employment only. The rural women engaged in agrarian work a 100 days program of the government do not get remuneration themselves. It goes to the pockets of their menfolk in the house. Hence it cannot be deemed as employment in its true sense. So, it is imperative that a woman should be educated to find a lucrative employment which would enable her to stand on her own legs. So strictly following

the Indian Constitutional Rights as right to free and compulsory education upto 14 years of age the government may make women literate. The enlightenment attained through literacy would sharpen their intellect, and widen their horizon to fly freely and fearlessly. So it is strongly recommended that parents, NGO's, Government Authorities should initiate action for educating the women, particularly of rural areas. The inherent talents of women, hitherto hidden and suppressed, would then naturally come out within a double vigor to place the incumbent in a decent and dignified position which means empowerment in its true sense.

## **VI. CONCLUSION:**

Superficially women empowerment means freeing the women from the age old shackles which paralyzed their movement under the pretext of domestic harmony, societal welfare and national tradition and culture. But in reality, it has a deeper meaning. If probed further, it can be found that the benefits of the women empowerment are manifold. First and foremost, it affects the triple freedom of thought, word and action hitherto denied to women. But psychologically women are less selfish and less self-centered than men. It's such she puts the freedom obtained through a proper use for the upliftment of family, welfare of the society and sustainable development of the nation. Hence it is imperative that a society to be called really an egalitarian society should pave the smooth and easy way for women empowerment which will take them to the next and ultimate stage of women emancipation.

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