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+91 99405 72462



+9163819 07438



ijmrsetm@gmail.com



www.ijmrsetm.com



Education of Rural Working Women for their Empowerment

Dr. Shivraj Kumar

Associate Professor and Head, Dept. of Teacher Education, N.M.S.N. Dass P.G. College, Budaun, India

ABSTRACT: In rural India, many important characteristics, such as equity and inclusiveness, have been ignored for many decades. Even though women constitute nearly half of the total population in India, they are often excluded from the politics and public representation. The Indian Constitution provides for the principle of gender equality in its preamble, and women's equality is provided as a fundamental right. The constitution places obligations on the state to foster the same as part of its fundamental duty and to provide a definitive direction through well-thought-out policies and directions. However, there is still a long way to go even after more than seventy years of independence. Each day, the media is full of stories of atrocities against women. These issues are concentrated more in areas and communities that still accept the age-old concept of male superiority. The social and economic structure in rural India has not changed much over the years. Underemployment, casteism, and lack of education have a major role to play in the marginalization of women, particularly in rural areas. The gender disparity, especially in rural India, is a glaring and grim reminder to the still rampant problem of gender discrimination. Women still have issues concerning financial exclusion and the lack of education opportunities, medical care, sanitation facilities, and more. To address the issue of women's equality and uplift their social status, the Government of India has made a concerted effort by way of laws, plans, and programs in various spheres, with the realization that the way forward is to shift the focus from welfare to development. Thus women's empowerment has gained recognition as the core issue in uplifting the status of women.

KEYWORDS: education, rural women, empowerment, working, equality, social, economic

I. INTRODUCTION

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in 2001 laid out goals and guiding principles for the empowerment of women:

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural, and civil;
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision-making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;¹
- (iv) Equal access of women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process;²
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

A collaborative model of strengthening local participation of women was developed by S M Government aided foundations (Government aided foundations), in which women elected representatives (WERs) of diverse institutions are trained and encouraged to collectively tackle problems of the village.

Government aided foundations teams have seen that collective action of women representatives is an effective tool to solve problems related to the functioning of village-level institutions and also streamlining the delivery of government schemes in villages. The sustainable work done under this unique model has helped in overcoming problems of the villages of Nuh district in Haryana. The WLS (Women Leadership School) model developed by Government aided foundations is now recognized as a powerful tool with the capacity to make a cumulative and radical change across 662,000 villages of India and the ability to harness the cumulative resources of neglected rural woman.³

The WLS uses a training guide that developed for women leaders to follow and guide others to overcome challenges of patriarchy, upgradation of skills and information, and guide them in activities and projects that are undertaken at the village level. This guide is designed to facilitate WLS sessions, where trainers can organize capacity-building sessions to foster leadership qualities in women. An interactive twelve-session program uses group discussions, case study-



based learning to inculcate bonding, improve leadership skills, and manage power dynamics. Women Leadership Schools have the capacity to lead transformative change in how governance processes and gender issues are looked at in India.⁴

To train women representatives in the villages of Nuh, Government aided foundations undertook training exercises for more than 400 elected representatives from twenty villages of different village-level institutions including the gram panchayat, school management committee (SMC), village health and sanitation committee (VHSNC), and anganwadi workers. The representatives were trained about the functions of these institutions with a structured curriculum. The program encouraged these women representatives to take up leadership roles through collective action for the overall development of villages. The results have contributed significantly to tackling local issues at the village level. In addition, a feeling of inclusion and self-esteem was inculcated—the first step in breaking the patriarchal divide.⁵

These women are now aware of schemes such as pensions (old-age, widow, handicapped, and deserted women), the public distribution system, Ayushman Bharat Yojana, labor card registration, Aapki Beti Hamari Beti, and many others. They are also informed about the work of the village-level institutions like VHSNC, SMC, and PRI, and their role as members. Armed with this knowledge, women are taking more actions at the village level. Often in a group, they go to different offices and meet officials and address the problems of the village.

Lack of wastewater disposal facilities was a common problem in the Gurnawat village. Dirty water was flowing onto the roads, due to inadequate wastewater disposal facilities, making the roads filthy. Women elected representatives (WERs) took the initiative to create wastewater disposal facilities⁶. They approached the sarpanch of the village, Dayawati, and explained the problem villagers were facing on a regular basis due to the unclean surroundings. The sarpanch was cooperative, met the secretary, and heard the women. Funds for the construction of nine soak pits were sanctioned within just a month. Right after the sanctioning of funds, a meeting was held among the WER to identify the areas to construct soak pits in the village. Pregnant women and children had faced difficulties accessing the anganwadi center as the roads were full of filthy water. However, since the construction of a soak pit in close proximity to the center, accessibility has been smooth.⁷

According to the villagers, the construction of soak pits helped in the reduction of filth over the roads. Although there was a soak well in the school for wastewater disposal, it was not enough for the school and was perpetually overflowing dirty water over the entire school campus. The school teacher said that five soak pits constructed in the primary and middle school have solved the disposal problem and also controlled mosquito breeding to a great extent, and the area now seems neat and clean.

Water is a necessity for life. Primary schools in Utton village didn't even have the basic amenities. A bore well in one of the schools had been dysfunctional for the past four years. Children carried water bottles from home. The cook at school found it difficult to fetch water for cooking and cleaning the utensils. Hence, the water to cook the mid-day meals was arranged by the families living close to the school.⁸

This challenge was discussed in a WER session with the school teachers, where they learned that the school had no funds to install a hand pump. In the next few days, there were meetings and discussions between all WER members, the sarpanch, and the school authorities regarding the issues faced by the students due to the unavailability of drinking water at the school. The sarpanch assured that the school would be provided with adequate funds for the construction of a hand pump. A hand pump was installed in the school during June 2019, with the assistance of the school teachers. Now the teachers and students are content due to the free access to clean drinking water from the hand pump. The parents of the students also realized that it was primarily due to the initiative of women's groups in the village that the water problem in the school was solved.⁹

In villages, due to the lack of local-level health facilities, villagers had to walk all through blocks for small health needs and for vaccination purposes. Discussions with women representatives revealed that to operate all the services, including an anganwadi worker, ASHA, and ANM, the anganwadi center in the village was too small. Hence, pregnant women and small children had to go to Taoru village to avail the services. The sarpanch understood the problem of the village and proposed construction of a sub-health center in the village in 2016. However, permission was not granted. After the constitution of WER in 2019, initiating the construction of a sub-health center was the first common problem raised by the women representatives.¹⁰

These women representatives approached the sarpanch once again on behalf of the WER, drafted an application with the signature of all the elected representatives, and submitted it to the sarpanch. One acre of the panchayat land was then allotted by the sarpanch for the construction of the sub-health center. The research team of Government aided foundations met the sarpanch to discuss the proceedings. The quality work of WER for village development, especially the initiative undertaken by women representatives for the construction of sub health centers in the village, was much appreciated by the sarpanch.

Government aided foundations is a rural development NGO that has been working to improve the lives of rural communities in India for more than twenty years. Led by a vision that every person deserves to lead a more secure,



prosperous, and dignified life, it has embarked on a mission to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India.¹¹

Government aided foundations creates an ecosystem of programs to address rural India's most pressing needs of water management, agriculture development, local participation and sustainability, school transformation and outreach for development. Thus, Government aided foundations works with local communities across rural India to understand and alleviate their problems. Inclusion and gender participation across entire community is of paramount importance in every effort. To achieve all-around development for marginalized communities, Government aided foundations supports gender parity by ensuring inclusivity in all its programs.¹²

II. DISCUSSION

Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face, which are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide. Rural women's access to education and training can have a major impact on their potential to access and benefit from income-generating opportunities and improve their overall well-being.¹³ A variety of approaches, including non-formal education, technical and vocational training, agricultural extension services, workplace training, training in new technologies and literacy and numeracy training are needed to address the various challenges rural women face. In addition, information and communication technologies (including mobile and electronic communication, etc.), supported by the right policies and institutional frameworks, can provide rural women with alternative avenues to access information related to their rights, services and resources, and social protection (e.g. identification card registration; laws on land, inheritance, and domestic/gender-based violence; and agriculture, market, health, nutrition information (among other)). Examples of Task Force member approaches to education, training and information include the ITC-ILO's Gender and Non Discrimination Programme, which partnered in a multi-stakeholder project on capacity building for the integration of women in sustainable development and economic policies. Elsewhere, FAO and IFAD also collaborate on an ongoing basis on communication for rural development, gender and land rights, producer organizations and cooperatives, awareness on socio-economic and gender issues, education and training for rural people, capacity building in socio-economic and gender analysis and institutional innovations.¹⁴ UNESCO's Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education supports efforts to improve girls' and women's access to secondary education as well as women's literacy, particularly for those who are excluded or marginalized from education in rural areas. UNDP pays special attention to the improvement of rural women's entrepreneurship skills through training in production and techniques, business management and functional literacy. UNIDO also works to improve the entrepreneurial/technical skills of rural and women entrepreneurs and to strengthen relevant support institutions and service providers to promote the development of entrepreneurship among rural women and communities in general. WFP supports training on nutrition, health, lifeskills, literacy and numeracy, and also facilitates sharing of knowledge of legal, political and social institutions for rural women. In partnership with the Barefoot College of India, UN Women supports hands on training of rural illiterate grandmothers in solar technology, so that they can become Barefoot Solar Engineers who will be equipped to solar electrify their villages. This provides them with an opportunity to access jobs in the green energy sector, and enhance poor rural household's living standard.¹⁵

III. RESULTS

The census 2011, counts women population @ 48.5% of the total population in India, In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has also spoken for women empowerment on 82nd edition of Mann Ki Baat. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon on others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family. The Constitution of India has certain provisions that specifically focus on women empowerment and prevents discrimination against women in the society.¹⁶ Article 14 talks about equality before law. Article 15 enables the state to make special provisions for women. As the progress of humanity is incomplete without women therefore successive governments have launched number of schemes for empowerment of women in male dominated society. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan has been launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country. Government is successfully able to promote this scheme by forming District Task Force and Block Task Force. The scheme was launched in Panipat district of Haryana on 22 January 2015 with an initial



funding of Rs. 100 crore¹⁷. Before launching of this scheme, Child Sex Ratio of Panipat was 808 in 2001 and 837 in 2011. After launching of this scheme the Child Sex Ratio of Panipat is improving day by day. Massive publicity is made about the program in print and electronic medias, the logo of this scheme is very common in government buildings such as pillars of National Highway 44, Panipat District Court, bus stand and railway station of Panipat district etc. Both earning and education are important factors for women empowerment. It might be possible that a woman is involved in unskilled work (for example: maids) but she is still not empowered. On the contrary, it might be possible that a woman is educated. But still she is not empowered because she is not earning. So, financial independence is important for women empowerment. Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker.¹⁸ Therefore, a scheme called working women hostels has been launched so that safe and convenient accommodation should be provided to working women. The benefit of this scheme is given to every working women without any distinction of caste, religion, marital status etc. In order to take benefit of this scheme, the gross total income of women should not exceed Rs. 50,000 per month in case of metropolitan cities whereas in case of small cities, the gross total income should not exceed Rs. 35,000 per month.¹⁹

United Nation General Assembly adopted the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW). CEDAW establishes an international bill of rights for women. Article 10 of CEDAW talks about providing right to education to women. India has ratified CEDAW for upliftment of women. The focus of the government has shifted from women development to women led development. In order to achieve this goal, government is working around the clock to maximize women's access to education, skill training and institutional credit. MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd) is one such scheme which was launched on 8 April 2015 in which loans upto Rs. 10 lakh are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral. For instance: A woman namely Kamla daily wage labourer from Panipat has taken a loan of Rs. 45,000 from State Bank of India in order to start work of beauty parlour and she is engaged in gainful employment with dignity now.²⁰

Earlier a lot of women left out their job after giving birth to children, due to which lot of working women unemployed. The government has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 increasing the maximum period of maternity leaves from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The landmark law has given a new life to the vision of women-led development as propagated by Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi. Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of the empowerment process. These components get develop through education. Educated woman aware about their rights and when women aware about their rights then she/her will not face discrimination. Though the successive Governments have come up with various measures for the welfare and empowerment of women but still women are facing hurdles in our society. Therefore, there is a need to do much more, to protect women. Also, there is a need to uphold their dignity at par with the status of men in the society.²¹

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Way Forward:

Education-

- The education policy needs to be more inclusive to ensure girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions. Also, education policy should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and women.
- In order to curb higher dropout rate among girls, there is a need for providing relatively higher financial incentives for girls education until Class XII.
- Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship should be extended from Single Girl Child Scheme to families with two girl child.
- Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.
- There is a need for strict implementation of statutes that emphasise on women empowerment through education.
- Additional emphasis should be laid on e-governance so that there is a timely check on the expenditure released by the centre and various state governments for scholarships for girl students.
- For security purposes, gender-friendly facilities should be provided in hostels.¹⁹



Skilling-

- In order to make women self-dependent, there is need to promote skill development among women in non-traditional works like electricians, plumbers etc.
- Women can be corporate into different professional groups so that there is improvement in their bargaining power.
- Platforms like Digital India should be used for marketing and branding purposes and to establish linkages with corporate, markets and consumers.
- In addition to government efforts, NGOs and other institutions should provide employable skills & training to women to help them find alternative and dignified occupations to earn decently.²⁰

Micro-Finance-

- NGOs working for the empowerment of women need to take interventions on livelihood development options related to the market and value chain.
- Policies and guidelines should be made in such a way that it is easy for women entrepreneurs to get credit facilities.
- Government should promote creation of Self Help group by women.
- There is need for industry-specific targets for women's employment and motivate their implementation by firm.
- Tax benefits should be given to companies that provide employment to 30 percent women workers.²¹

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