

WOMEN EDUCATION IN KERALA; A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL GROUP INFLUENCE.

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Abstract

India is famous as a great country of many cultures, traditions, religions and geographical characteristics. However, at the same time, India is also known by the sobriquet “male chauvinistic nation”. The male chauvinist half of the nation tends to forget that India is referred to as “Bharat Mata” the mother to every Indian, as well. Traditionally, women have been compelled to play the second fiddle in every sphere, be it in family or public life. Such in order of things in India in spite of the fact that women nowadays, are no less proficient than men in any field. In the case Kerala women, the same as the above. But today, women are not what they used to be some years ago; they have now made their presence felt in every sphere of life. Women have ultimately discarded their homely image and are now making meaningful contribution to the progress of the nation but, are the progress made by women in all-encompassing phenomenon, or is it confined to some specific cases only? Have all women been empowered? If not, what is the story of the women who are not empowered? Has the common woman have vested with powers to drive the nation? It is precisely these questions that this essay will attempt to throw some light upon. Here the researcher analyzing the concept, women empowerment by incorporating all divergent views with sufficient logical reasoning. It also explains the problems faced and the possibilities ahead in achieving women empowerment through education.

Key words: Women higher education, Women empowerment, Social influence

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has presented new challenges in the realization of the goal of empowering women and now women empowerment has become the slogan and motto of many social reformers, governmental agencies and voluntary organizations. There is a long-cherished wish among all the women to have better avenues in life in order to lead the life in a more fruitful way. However, the concept women empowerment is a matter of controversy even now. Empowerment is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enable them to move towards life with greater dignity and self-assurance. In fact, an empowered woman is a nation’s strength. The United Nations Organization had declared the year 1975 as women year and the decade 1975-1985 as

women decade on an international level (2005, p.37). If enabled economists and social scientists to unveil many issues related to women. So various studies were conducted and made a consensus that so long as women remain depressed and exploited no nation can enjoy freedom and justice. It is found that when half of the population is denied the opportunities for utilizing their full potential, the economic parameter like growth, development and welfare remains undefined. So various steps were taken to define the concept of women empowerment and to find out ways through which women can be empowered.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The word 'empowerment' is one, which is widely used but seldom defined. It is an active, multi-dimensional process which encompasses several multi reinforcing components that begin with and supported by economic independence. Power is the key word of the term empowerment. According to the International Encyclopedia (1999 p.33). Power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired, social, political and economic goals or status. Power means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Webster's New World Dictionary (1982) says the prefix 'em' which attached to the noun power is generally used to form verbs meaning to make, make in to etc. So, the word 'empower' means to make or cause power.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Empowerment literally means becoming powerful. In that perspective the empowerment of women and the improvement of their status, particularly in respect of education, health and economic opportunities is highly important. Women need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for the building up of the family, society and the nation. Infact women empowerment is human empowerment itself. According to Sushama Shay (1998, p.56.) Women Empowerment is a process which helps women to change other women's consciousness through creating awareness.

A. Importance of women empowerment

Human development encompasses elements that contribute critical issues of gender and development. The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society. According to Rameshwari Pandya (2008) Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family/household and in turn development of a nation of a country. Empowerment of women leads to benefit not only to the individual woman and to women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development. (2008, p.5).

B. Purpose of Women empowerment

Women must define their own needs and goals as well as strategies. A pre-requisite for women's participation in development process is their empowerment. Women must exercise full participation in decision making process in all walks of life and fully participate with men in finding equitable and practical solution to issues both in the family and society. It also declared that human rights of women and girl child are inalienable, integral and invisible parts of universal human Rights. In her message to mark the First day of the „year of Empowerment of women“, the national commission for women chairperson Vibha Partha Sarathi said, „the year to come must see women in apex decision making bodies, enter profession denied to them so far, recognize their contribution on important and legitimate and help them to fight against disease and deprivation, indignity and inequity.

EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Various writers highlight the role of education for the empowerment of women According to the International Encyclopedia on women (1999) in the programme of action of the International Conference on population and Development education is considered as one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge skill and self confidence necessary to participate fully in development process. The National Policy on Education (1986) emphasized the promotion of women's education in all areas of learning to eliminate any sex based stereo typing with the guarantee of equality before the law and the emphasize on girl's education. Since employment plays a vital role in improving women's status in a society education of women is of prime importance in any women empowerment programme.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN KERALA IN THE 21st CENTURY

The education of women was not in a process of development at the dawn of 19th century. The society had general prejudice against female education. The prohibition against women learning to read was probably due to various causes. It was believed that education was considered rather profane and immoral by aristocratic ladies. There was a very strong social prejudice against the education of women. But there was a small section of women who had received education. They were devadasis, the daughters of Nair tarawads and the Syrian girls. Courtesans whose business in life is to dance in the temples and public ceremonies and prostitutes are the only women who are allowed to learn to read, sing or dance. The next group of the girls who received education was the girl children in Nair and Syrian families. In these girls were admitted along with boys in the indigenous institution called 'Ezhuthupallies'. Logan (1951, p.107) pointed out the indigenous schools were freely attended

by girls. The aim of girls' education in these institutions was to give training in elementary, moral instruction and some basic lessons in music.

Period of learning was from five to seven years of age and some girls of this age group attended school. Formal higher education as denied to them. The main defect of this indigenous system of elementary schools was the exclusion of girls except some Nair and Syrian children. Another defect was that the children of both sexes of the low castes who formed the vast majority of population were denied admission in these schools. Therefore, in the beginning of the 19th century there existed a kind of village education which was exclusively meant for high caste boys and a very small section of the middle-class girls including devadasis. So, it may be concluded that expect an extremely small number of women who received some rudimentary education either at home or in schools, general or special, almost the whole of the female population of the country was deprived of formal education. It was against this back ground that the missionaries and government agencies launched a new venture of providing education irrespective of caste or sex. (1995, p.55)

WOMEN EMPOWEREMENT AND GOVERNMENT SECTOR

According to Kerala government survey report, (2001, p. 149) The objective of the Women Empowerment Year is to create large scale awareness with the active participation of women themselves. In Kerala the relevance of empowering women is all the more important since half of the population is women. So, any development programme should not neglect this better half of the population. In this respect it follows the guidelines of UNO and government of India. Followed by the directions and steps taken on a national level for empowering women, the government of Kerala too is entrusted with task of uplifting women and trying to bring them to the forefront of the society. The achievements of Kerala have been well acclaimed by many and Kerala is projected as „the model state of development. The human development report of 1996 by the UNDP discussed Gender development Index (GDI) For 16 Indian states and Kerala is placed at the top of the list in terms of basic female capabilities India's female literacy rate is 39.29 % and Kerala's female literacy rate is 87.86%. In Kerala a major programme launched during the 2nd plan was the setting up of social welfare Extension centers. Its projects help to promote social welfare schemes for women subsequent plans increased the number of projects. Major achievement assignments in Kerala are explained under different heads.

Kerala women's commission is a statutory organization under the state government and was constituted under the section 5 of the Kerala women's commission Act 1990 to improve the status of women in Kerala.

Kerala state women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) was registered on 22- 2- 1988 by the company Act 1956. It works for women employment income and to enable them to earn a better living.

Empowerment and Kudumbasree mission: The Kerala government has initiated a special project exclusively for women namely Kudumbasree on 17th May 1998. Its motto is – “Reaching out the families through women and reaching out to the community through families” The aim of the project is to eradicate the absolute poverty within a period of ten years. This is achieved through concerted community action under the leadership of local self-governments.

Role of Christian Missionaries

Along with the government, various Christian missionaries like LMS, CMS and BEMS- the pioneers of women development made continuous efforts to popularize women education and empowerment. This type of voluntary organizations is set up an organizational entity by a group of persons on their own initiative or partly by an outside motivation which maybe religious or human, to help the people of a locality by undertaking activities in a self-reliant manner. It is controlled and administered by an association of, rather than by the government and is primarily financed by contribution from the members of the community from any other outside donor agency.

LMS missionaries were the first protestant missionary society which sent missionaries to Kerala. Johanna Mead was the pioneer missionary in the field of women education in Kerala.

She began her work for women by starting a school in Nagarcoil. This was the first girls' school in Kerala.

Aims – The missionaries had definite aims in starting girls' school when the Christian missionaries began their work in India they realized that no stable and certainly no Christian community could be built up under conditions where women were incompetent to teach the young. The main aim in starting these schools in Travancore was to bring girls more completely under Christian influence in the hope that, if thus educated they could become converts and be fitted for the work of extending knowledge of truth among their countrymen. The missionaries also found that education was one of the means to raise women folk from their low Board of Directors of the LMS as well as the missionaries regarded female education as very important. Therefore, when Johanna Mead started the first girls' school, her primary object was to impart a plain education, united with religious instruction. So, the aims of girls' education of the missionaries can be summarized as humanitarian and religious concerns.

Church missionary society (CMS) was the child of Evangelical Anglicanism. Like other missionary societies Evangelization was the main aim of the CMS Missionaries. To attain that objective, they wanted to educate the people. The missionaries thought that while the women who determine the atmosphere of the home remain

ignorant and superstitious, is to say the least of it, a wasteful method Therefore the missionary's imparted education to boys and girls.

Aims of female education was to provide suitable wives for pastors, catechists, school masters and other mission agents The missionary register gives a clear picture of the aim of women's education. According to it, all Christians who really aim at the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in India admit that in pursuance of that object female education is one of the chief things which ought to be promoted It continued: But whatever we may do, and whatever we may say, the church of Christ will never appear in its great beauty, unless the foundations of Christian Education be laid in the minds of its members by the hands of a Christian Mother. Amelia Baker was the pioneer of girl's education in North Travancore. She started a school for girls in Kottayam in 1820.

Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (BEMS). Hermann Gundert was the founder of the Malabar Mission of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society. In 1839 the first centre was opened at Nettur in Tellicherry in British Malabar. Along with evangelical work the missionaries concentrated on educational activities also.

Aims – Like the other missionaries it also had some specific aims. Evangelization was its main objective . According to 5th Report; preaching in Bazaars and fairs itinerant preaching work among the women evangelization by schools and by the medical mission had been vigorously carried on by the society to attain that object. The aim of education according to Rehm, one of the missionaries was to implant religion in the hearts of the pupils. They also wanted the girls to become fit helpmates to their husbands and mothers, able to bring up their children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Women empowerment is an essential element in national development. Since women constitute half of the population there can be no development unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. In fact, empowered women are a nation's strength. Since development means improvement in the living conditions of the society, as a whole, it is logical to expect that this also mean improved status for women. The effective management and development of women's resources, their capabilities, interests, skills and potentialities are of paramount importance for the mobilization of human resources. In the Indian social, cultural and economic context, no one can achieve the whole purpose of women's empowerment and emancipation within a short span of time. However, the women have utilized the chances given to them and made considerable progress. As formal agency, the government of India wanted to improve the living conditions of women at different times. Here education played an important role for women empowerment. The activities of the

missionary societies in the field of women's education have brought about tremendous changes in the society of Kerala.

- Attitude towards girls' education: The activities of the missionaries helped to change the attitude of the people towards girls' education.
- Literacy rate: As a result of the activities of the missionaries there was rapid spread of education among the people of Kerala especially among women. In 1947, the percentage of literacy of males was 58.1 and that of females 36.0.
- Development of social awareness: members of each caste became aware of their rights in the society and tried to improve their conditions
- Abolition of social evils: Certain social evils such as sati, smartha, devadasi system, pula Pedi etc. Disappeared from the society of Kerala.
- Introduction of western culture: The missionaries introduced western education and culture in Kerala.

Therefore, when one compares the education and status of women in Kerala of the 18th and the first half of the 20th century it can be seen that the condition of women in the 18th century was very miserable. But the educational activities of the missionaries helped to eradicate many evil customs and practices in the society, to develop a favorable attitude towards girl's education among women. These facilities tremendously enhanced the educational and social status of women in the society of Kerala in the first half of the 20th century. In the light of the present study the investigator made certain recommendations for further development.

Change in the attitude of men in the society: Both men and women should aware of about the concept of women empowerment. From the very onset an attitudinal change in the society is necessary towards the concept.

Change in the attitude of women in the society. Women's own perception of themselves and on their empowerment should be changed. They should strive to change their image as weak, dependent, passive and docile persons to independent, active, strong and determined human beings.

In the academic level: It is important to create awareness about it among the younger generation especially among the students and the youth.

In the political level: One of the ways by which women empowerment can become a reality is through proper policies and legislations that are women friendly in nature.

In the administrative level: empowerment of women is a necessity for the sustainable development of a nation. So policy of the government should be women friendly in its various schemes. This can be possible through various ways that are listed below.

- Awareness campaign, Workshops and seminars should be arranged at the village
- Literature and publications are a major area through which the whole notion of women empowerment can be inculcated to the society
- Arranging programmes for interaction with other empowered women in the society is another important way of motivating women.
- The institutions that are engaged in various fields of social work can start short term diploma or certificate courses in areas of rural development with special emphasis on projects for women's development.
- Government should make sure that each official body has sufficient number of women members

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