



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT-A CHALLENGE FOR NGOs

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Abstract: The existence of humanity on this planet depends on the efforts and contribution of its population. Men and women are co-existing to make the world a better place to live in. However, history has witnessed time and again that women are the victims of the male dominated society. The world in spite of propagation of equality amongst both sexes; is facing a serious challenge. Many socio-religious movements have made significant contribution in improving the condition of women. In the 21st century we witness women surpassing the men in many fields but yet a lot is required to be done. Many women do not know about their rights and are afraid to share their woes. The womenfolk need to be enlightened and made aware of their rights and powers. Here the role of NGOs is of great importance. Many NGOs are working for the empowerment of women and they do not get any aid from Government. They are volunteering themselves for this cause. This paper is an attempt to study the role of NGOs in empowering women. But the question is that how far they have been successful in their goal.

Index Terms - Women Empowerment, Human Rights, NGO, Rotary International, Junior Chamber International.

The concept of Human rights is as old as humanity itself and universal to all known ancient civilisations and encompasses values that are the common heritage of mankind. Human rights are rights, which belong to individuals as a consequence of being a human. These rights are considered to be absolute essential and personality development of human begins. Without them human beings would be reduced to the level of animals. "Government do not protect human rights, they violate them" is a controversial but true statement attributed to a leading Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Activists. Non-Governmental Organisations are a new name for voluntary organisations. The history of voluntary organisations is as old as human civilisations. In one word the concept of NGO's widened from charity and welfare because the ultimate object of human existence lies in the peace and welfare of human beings. This noble task can be achieved through the act and deeds, by salvaging human beings from the miseries and bondages that are responsible for all the exploitation of mankind. There have been concerted efforts all through the ages to promote the welfare of human being through social, religious, spiritual and other public spirited movements. The essential feature of NGO movement is to mark a sphere of freedom for people to consider themselves to be free and to move people forward towards a society built on justice, civility and happiness. Justice is meant for both men and women and the mere fact that "Women hold up half the sky" does not appear to give them a position of dignity and equality. Widespread disparities still exist in people's access to opportunities in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms as well as to education, healthcare, financial resources, and physical and mental well-being. The impact of inequality is reflected in the status of women in India. Women are not aware about their rights and NGOs can help, guide and motivate them to stand for their honour and rights. When speaking to more than 1,000 women from the 10 regions of the country on September 29, 2012, at the inauguration of the Congress of Women's Movement (CWM), in Cape Coast, Dr. Mrs. Linda Forde, Director at the Counseling Department of the University of Cape Coast (UCC), said: "An empowered woman is an asset to society and when a woman is empowered Economically, socially, and politically, she improves as a partner, wife, mother, leader in the community, and contributor to the advancement of the country. Adishankaracharya has stated in his book Sahitya Lahiri that "If power is snatched from Shiva, it becomes SHAV (corpse)". It depicts that the basis of men's power is women, and women cannot be underestimated. The term "women" In order to move from the margins to the center stage, women must have the ability to control their day-to-day social, political, and economic affairs. This is what empowerment essentially means. Women can realize their identity and authority in all spheres of life through the active and multifaceted process of empowerment. India does poorly in terms of how women are treated for a nation whose female population alone exceeds the total population of several other nations. The number of sexual abuse and domestic violence cases against women clearly shows that women in India do not enjoy even basic human rights. Given such a scenario, it becomes clear that women charities have an important role to play. There has been growing recognition of the need to address basic women problems and to adopt more participatory approaches to achieve development goals. Governments and donors have begun to rely increasingly on NGOs in developed and developing countries as partners in the development process. A great many NGOs have shown an interest in empowering women to improve their lives, as well as in enhancing people's economic standing and general well-being. A significant phenomenon that has implications for the development prospects of women is the rise of NGOs in the global environment. In recent years, all the developmental sectors like to incorporate women's participation in development. But different social and religious values, beliefs, norms, prejudices have kept the women far away from such progress. To raise the status and position of women many development organizations like Association for Community Development (ACD), Action for Development of Demos (ADD), Priyadarshini Seva Mandali, Vidyaranya, SERUDS, Annai Charitable & Educational Trust, Chaithanya Educational and Rural Development Society -, Swadhar IDWC (Institute for Development of Women & Children), Centre for social research, Bani Mandir, Kalgidhar Trust, Rotary International, Junior Chamber International and many more are working together with the government to empower the women and girls of India, guarantee their fundamental rights, innovative

work in the areas of Health and Well-being, education, livelihoods, governance and social and cultural rights of women and increase understanding of social issues from a gender perspective. These NGOs are helping married women in having primary or secondary level education, giving financial help for girls' marriages, legal assistance for divorce and its registration, domestic violence, constructing short stay home and help for rehabilitation of women and taking initiative for remarriage of widows. Apart from these activities these women centric NGOs also provide social support to women in decision making, self- respect, freedom of movement, entertainment, dietary habits, personal hygiene and sanitation, children education and social gathering. The NGOs need to educate women about their rights so that they can fight for them. There is no doubt that the voice of women is increasingly heard in parliament, courts and the streets. Women in the west had to fight for over a century to get basic rights, like right to vote. Unfortunately, women in the country are mostly unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and the oppressive traditions. But the fact is that how many educated women get justice, leave the tales of illiterate women. Stella James, who graduated from NUIS Kolkata this year and now works at the NGO Natural Justice, Lawyers for Communities and the Environment, wrote about an alleged incident of physical, sexual assault by an unnamed, retired Supreme Court judge in late 2012, while she was his intern. Last month, CNN published the account of an American student who said her three months in India last fall were marked by near-daily sexual harassment. The student, Michaela Cross, recently spoke to The Wall Street Journal's India Real Time about her experiences in India, a country that she says she still loves. Tarun J Tejpal is an Indian journalist, publisher, novelist and former editor-in-chief of Tehelka magazine. In November 2013, he stepped down as editor for six months after a woman colleague accused him of sexual assault. The question is not just getting justice but will these victims still be given due respect in society or they will become laughing stock for men. The real meaning of empowerment loses its sheen and the reality is that no one empowers anyone, the best way is self-empowerment. This can be achieved by improving the social and economic status. Despite all these measures there should be a strong determination among every man that every woman in this country should be honoured. Only then empowerment in its true meaning will be realized. The NGOs should come forward to help these victims lead normal life. In Jalandhar NGOs like Junior Chamber International, Rotary International, Goonj, Pahal, Aas di Kiran, Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan etc., are relentlessly involved in improving the condition of downtrodden which includes women too. These agencies are helping the destitute women in different areas of Jalandhar. It has made some contribution in areas of Bhargav Camp, Abad Pura, Maqdoom Pura, Gandhi Camp, Industrial Area etc. Government should monitor the activities and efforts taken by NGOs and also provide financial as well technical support to the NGOs. Organizations should also hold awareness camps for males to change their mindset and come forward to assist women for their overall development. Members of NGOs should provide mental and financial support to the women who want to go for higher education and if needed they should also counsel their parents / elders in the family. Social gathering, entertainment, education and self-motivation are the key areas in which NGOs should put some more efforts. The task of women empowerment is challenging as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep-rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. The malice is not going to get away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. Unless society accepts gender equality as a fundamental principle of human existence all efforts will only partially bear results. Gender sensitization and gender training is primary need of the hour. Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws and policies just remain on paper. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in India is a long battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development. Though the government and various NGOs are taking initiative in improving the condition of women in order to empower them but the fact is that hardly 25% of our women are literate, among the rural 85% are illiterate, over 90% of women work in unorganised sector where no child care or maternity benefits are available; number of unemployed girls who have completed school has risen to 51 lakhs, 65% of pregnant women are found to be anaemic, children dying of malnutrition before the age of 5 is about 40%. The menace of dowry, violence against women, sexual harassment, damaging portrayal of women in the media, infanticide, foeticide etc are growing. Still there is no denying the fact that each move towards the betterment of women will bring a slow and steady change. We see significant impact of NGO's on women in our areas. Now women have started earning money, heading towards becoming self-reliant and self-motivated. They take their own decisions and give suggestions in family concerns. We hear sermons, exhortations from public platforms, commissions and conferences, but our rhetoric has not been matched by action. The greatest need of the hour is attitudinal change; we have to alter our mindset and treat women as human beings with the same rights to which men are entitled. The NGOs play important role to become a concrete expression of International, National, Regional and local voice to assist and stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves. It may be noted that silence nourishes oppression, therefore it is necessary for NGOs to be given new strength and resolve in their actions. It is time to promote twin pillars of equality and non-discrimination without which the society cannot progress. Now NGOs are powerful new agents on the global scene with both a capacity and willingness to promote women awareness. They address variety of issues such as religion, sexual harassment, emergency aid, medical assistance and humanitarian affairs. They mobilise public support and voluntary contribution for aid, they usually have strong links with community groups in developing countries and they often work in areas where government aid is not possible. NGOs are accepted as international relations landscape.

CONCLUSION

We have to accept this fact that these NGOs are selflessly working hard to help our women to realise their dreams and making them self-reliant. The recent Manipur case has posed a serious threat to the safety of women, which needs to be seriously taken up by women cell and NGO's. We must ensure that NGOs keep the fire burning to carry their crucial role to achieve the goal of women empowerment.

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