

A STUDY ON EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN HANDLOOM WEAVERS OF MADURAI DISTRICT IN TAMIL NADU STATE

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Abstract

Since time immemorial the Indian Women are considered as a source of power. Mother is the source of giving life to everyone. The status of Women and he rights were perhaps the most honour in the earliest phases of Indian History and in Vadic Age. An important moment in the history of Indian women folk came in the nineteenth century, which witnessed various political and social movements. During the British rule women organized themselves and started participating in the national struggle for freedom. The final phase of the struggle for freedom revealed the fact that the Indian women was capable of sacrificing anything a noble cause. These movements and social reforms had created awareness among the poor and the suppressed women and they took to struggle for their own rights.

keywords: *social reforms, Empowerment of Women, Human Development Report, Census of India, agricultural labourers, industrial sector*

Introduction

The two world wars compelled women to participate in occupation, which was the monopoly of men earlier. The employment of women in the industries including those who married was a fairly widespread phenomenon ij the 19th century.

It was the first rationing system in 1943 that the middle class women stepped out en masses to serve in the offices, though previously, there were women teachers, doctors and nurses. An industrial revolution led to developing sources of conflict between the two genders. As traditional society began to crumble, cash income became an important source of social status. Hence, a women had to join the labour force for earning out of household work. Employment to women is the desire of entrepreneurs in order to utilize cheap labour for profit purpose.

The increase in income also meant that more families could afford to send their female children to high schools and their mothers, were attracted towards labour force by the possibility of higher pay. Education has worked as prime factor to motivate the women

to work. They want to be self sufficient and understand very well economic self-sufficiency has improved their social status.

From the fervent feminism of the sixties to the introspection on women's status in the seventies, to women-in-development debates in the eighties and to focus on gender issues in the nineties, has been a momentous but short transition. From women's problems to women's issues, finally to women's prospective, there has been a whole reshaping of paradigms of development. In recent times, the concept of women's development has shifted to 'Empowerment of Women'. Gandhiji observed "to call women the weak sex is a libel; it is men's injustice to women. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed women is less brute than man; if by strength is meant power, then, women is immeasurably man's superior". The development of a society is as much dependent upon women as it is on men

When a woman moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves. These words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru are often repeated because it is an accepted fact, that a nation's greatness depends on how its women enjoy respect and status in the country.

Status of Women in the World

It is understandable that the status of women worldwide is imbalance and disparity in participation of women in the areas of political governing bodies, education, health and prevalence of violence.

There is inequality in the opportunity given to girls for their formal school education worldwide. Of the world's nearly one billion illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. Women outlive men in almost every country. There are slightly fewer women than men in the world, 98.6 women for every 100 men. Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

Status of Women in India

Women constitute 48.2 per cent of the total population of the country and women workers constitute 25.68 per cent of the total workforce in the country (Census2001). According to Human Development Report2001 a female on an average spent 34.6 hours per week as compared to 3.6 hour by man in the production of own account services, which qualify for inclusion in the satellite accounts.

According to the Census of India2001, the literacy percentage of women was only 54.16 per cent though it has grown considerably since Independence. In 1951 the literacy rate of women was only 8.86 per cent. In India women's participation in the economic and the political decision making is very low. Human Development Report, 1999 shows the ratio

of women administrators and managers in India as low as 2.7 per cent which is even lower than that of the countries like Pakistan (4.3 per cent) and Bangladesh (4.9 per cent). The share of females in the Parliament is only 8.3 per cent in India.

Status of Rural Women

The Census of India(2001) estimated that 21 per cent women participate in economic development. Almost 50 per cent of the rural workers were reported female of whom 55 per cent were reported as cultivators and only 24 per cent as agricultural labourers. Three-fourth of Indian women live in rural areas, comprising around 5,00,000 villages.

On any given indicator of development, the rural women are disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. The profile of rural women is that of a poor, ignorant, illiterate, superstitious and suppressed being with a low level of skills. Her access to information, assets and opportunities is also low. She is unorganized and under represented.

Empowerment of women

“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless condition of women are improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly only with one wing.”

- Vivekananda

“Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including participation in the decision making process and access to power are fundamental for the advancement of equality, development and peace”.

-Beijing Declaration.

Textile Industry in India

Textile industry satisfies one of the basic needs of mankind namely clothing. India ranks to be the fifth country in textile production. It is the only industry in forties, which shared know-how from Japan. India is also considered a pioneer in this industry.

The Indian textile industry is nearly 186 years old, with the first mill on modern lines having been set up in 1817. From small beginnings and against heavy odds, it has made phenomenal growth, especially after the country gained Independence. Today, it has not only grown to be the largest segment of the country's industrial sector accounting for about 20 per cent of the total industrial output.

The industry has a complex and varied structure. At one end of the spectrum is the hand spun, hand woven sector and on the other is the sophisticated, capital intensive, high speed machine sector. There is also an intermediate segment consisting of small scale

power loom units, dispersed mostly in the semi-urban and the rural areas all over the country.

The three segments of the Indian textile industry are:

1. Composite mills in the organized sector where both spinning and weaving take place under one roof
2. Spinning mills in the organized sector and
3. Decentralized sector consisting of handlooms and power looms.

In recent years, with a boom in exports, textile have also emerged as the largest contributor to India's exports and to foreign exchange earnings.

Women in Handloom Sector

The division of work in the handloom sector is similar to that of the power loom sector. The considerable presence of women in power looms and handlooms is largely due to the lower forms of technology which permit labour-intensive production processes. There is substantial empirical evidence that women's labour is inexpensive and it works to the advantage of employers and contractors to employ them. Where production accesses to family labour, women seldom get paid for their labour.

In India, hundreds of women who weave cloth by hand. They work from their cottages, often in very remote, rural areas. Their looms are at home so that they can attend to their household duties and nurture their children a while and at the same time, earn an income for their families. Man provides partnership in this demanding live hood mainly by selling and taking all the credit. The handloom in India is a neglected national treasure like the Indian women.

Significance of Handloom sector

With a long tradition of excellence in its craftsmanship India's handloom textile sector occupies a place of eminence in preserving its heritage and culture. The level of artistry and intricacy achieved in the handloom fabrics is un parrelled and beyond the scope of modern machinery. It caters to the needs of a diverse cultural ethos ranging from the exquisite fabrics which take months to the weave to the popular items of mass production for daily use. Hand-weaving is one of the richest and the most resilient media of ethnic expression.

The last 100 years have seen the growth of mechanized textile production internationally. Due to competition, handloom has lost much of the market and is almost non-existent in most countries. However, handlooms are still a force to reckon within India and some other Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand and combodia.

Handlooms have a umbilical linkage with cotton farmers and the rural farm economy. Agricultural labour gets employment in the handloom sector during non-

agricultural season. The sector has self-sustaining mechanism, including training for young weavers, irrespective of gender. The inheritance of skills, resources and capacities has remained beyond realm and reach of any modern training and educational institution. The sustaining of the weaving skill itself has not been dependent on the Government or any modern formal institution. There is also inherent flexibility for all type of communities to take up the handloom production as a profession

Need for the Study

Many attempts have been made to study the poor living conditions of the people in the handloom sector in general. As far as the researcher's knowledge goes, no concrete effort has been made to focus on the empowerment of women handloom weavers.

Empowerment of women handloom weavers will fill the vacuum that exists at present in understanding their economic empowerment.

It is hoped that a study on the specific empowerment of women in handloom sector will give an insight in understanding their problems and prospects in a wider perspective and will be useful to the policy makers.

Statement of Problem

In the last decade of the 20th century a good number of handloom weavers committed suicide due to poverty and pitiable living conditions. Various factors contributed to this sad predicament. Huge stock of unsold finished products and very poor sales due to people's choice of the power loom products pushed the handloom weavers to end their lives. With the intention of leading a helping hand, various social organizations and political parties opened "Porridge Wells". Realising the grim life of the handloom weavers, throughout the state awareness was created and women and men started buying handloom products at the instigation of the Government and voluntary organizations. The researcher was very much affected by this situation and decided to study the lives of the handloom weavers. This traditional industry touched its lowest ebb and was almost on the verge of extinction. This further affected the mind of the researcher and motivated her to go for an in depth analysis of their life style. Of the handloom weavers 60 per cent are women folk. As the researcher herself is a member of the feminine gender, she decided to bring to the limelight the pathetic plight of the women handloom weavers and their empowerment.

Objectives

The major objectives of the study are:

- i. To prepare a profile of the women handloom weavers.
- ii. To estimate the incidence of poverty among the women handloom weavers.
- iii. To study the economic empowerment of the women handloom weavers

- iv. To study the social and political empowerment of the women handloom weavers.
- v. To suggest measures for empowering the women handloom wavers and promoting the welfare through appropriate policy and programmes.

Scope of the Study

The empowerment of women in handloom sector is necessary during the present scenario. The study throws light on the economic aspects like, income, expenditure, debt and asset position to find out their economic conditions.

Methodology

This section describes the methodology adopted in the present study which includes the choice of the study area, period of the study sampling design, the collection of data and the tools used for analysis.

Area of the Study

Madurai was selected for the intensive study of the empowerment of women handloom wavers.

Period of the Study

The period taken for the study is 2014-15 and the data collection starts from December 2014 to March 2015.

Sources of Data

The present study employed the primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through the personal interview method. The secondary data were collected from the assistant directorate of handloom Madurai, journals, Books. Periodicals and related other sources.

Sampling Design

Madurai District has been selected for the present study for the reason that it has the highest percentage of the women handloom wavers. The strata for this study area weavers workers and the prathama wavers. A list of all the women weavers in each area in Madurai district was received from the Assistant Directorate of Handloom Madurai.

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