



CHANGING WOMEN'S STATUS & EMPOWERMENT IN GUJARAT STATE

RINKUBEN G. PRAJAPATI

Ph. D. Research Scholar
Dept. of Sociology
Hemchandracharya North Gujarat
University Patan
(GJ) INDIA

DR. P. R. GAVLI

Research Guide, Dept. of Sociology
Shree Ambaji Arts & Commerce College
Ambaji Affiliated to Hemchandracharya
North Gujarat University Patan
(GJ) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is one of the most challenging social issues in India. It is the ever running topic all over the country. Gujarat has taken various progressive steps for Women's Empowerment. And the positive outcomes of these initiatives are already visible. This is an era of quantum leaps in development. This is an era of ensuring and securing active participation of the Woman Power in development. Through this paper you can study the initiatives undertaken in Gujarat for Women's Empowerment.

Keywords: - Empowerment, Equality, Gender Equality, Gujarati Women

INTRODUCTION

The term **empowerment** refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. **Empowerment** of women now can be categorized into five main parts – social, educational, economic, political and psychological.



UNICEF says **gender equality** "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It **does** not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike."

During International Women Year 1975, the constraints and obstacle in the area of women development were identified and various measures were exercised to address the same. As a part of this movement, Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation Ltd. was established in March-1981.

This is an era of quantum leaps in development. This is an era of ensuring and securing active participation of the Woman's Power in development. International Women's Day, March 8th, brought a ray of hope. However, 33% reservation for women seems to be falling prey to the politics of Vote Bank.

Asian nations have had an influence of the Indian culture. Countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Srilanka, India, Indonesia accepting women as the Head of their nation is quite natural. History is a witness to it.

On the other hand, there are nations, in the more developed Western world, that consider preaching others as their fundamental right and carry the mantle of flag-bearers to Women's Empowerment. Such nations have developed cold feet in accepting a woman as their Nation-State Head in this 21st century! Even in the most developed country like the US of America, the cradle of Democracy since 1776, women had to struggle for voting rights, put in lot of sacrifices, and endure sufferings. Then in 1920 women secured the right to vote. For 150 years only the men had enjoyed the privilege of voting rights!

It take pride in sharing this fact about men from rural Gujarat. There are more than 50 villages where men have elected women for the 'Panchayat'. More importantly, the men didn't field their candidature in these elections and simply entrusted their women with the task of administration and handed over the reins to women in their villages.

A state level convention of women farmers organised by several organisation working with women said that there was a need to make agri policies at the centre and state level more gender friendly.

A study by Itishree Pattnaik, assistant professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR) that focused on feminized agriculture found that in Gujarat 65% of women are working in agriculture as compared to just 44% men.



"While the share of women in agriculture is more than men it has not meant a rise in income for the former. In fact their income is on the decline compared to men," said Pattnaik. She said this is because historically it is accepted that agriculture does not pay as much as other sectors. "So men are moving out of agriculture thus ensuring better income while women continue to be in a sector where income is on the decline," said Pattnaik. She said that if that wasn't enough, the gender disparity in wages being paid to male and female agriculture workers also play a role in widening the income gap between men and women.

It also found that for every 1000 male, there were 1111 females who worked in agriculture in a principal status (as main workers).

Shilpa Vasavada convener of Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGLO) said there is a need for special and separate budgetary provision in agriculture and designing of agricultural schemes from women farmers' perspective to ensure gender equity and enhance higher yield in agriculture.

Explaining how the lack of gender sensitive policies that do not take into consideration women's contribution in agriculture affects them, Sejal Dand of Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch said that 51 talukas in Gujarat have been declared drought hit recently. "But when it comes to compensating the farmers for the loss suffered due to drought, it is often the men who get the compensation because the land is in their name while it is the woman who toils on the land," said Dand.

The lack of gender segregated data means we don't know how the agri policies are benefitting or if they are benefitting women in the first place, she said.

A woman farmer, Bhanuben of Narmada's Sagbara taluka said that while women agricultural labourers get paid just Rs100 the men get Rs 150 although the work expected of both of them is the same. "Even under MGNREGA schemes women get Rs 800 per week while the men get Rs970 per week," said Bhanuben.

Dand said that a small survey in four districts covering 800 women farmers found that of the 3225 families cover only 3 per cent women owned land and of this 1.3 per cent of the women did not even know that the land was in their own name.

The **objectives** behind establishing the corporation are

(1) To create various venues of economic activities and make the women of Gujarat earn income for their better livelihood.



(2) To plan, encourage and co-ordinate different activities in the field of economic development of women.

(3) To create awareness amongst deprived women of the state and bring them into mainstream and make them economically and socially sound so that they also may contribute to the development of the state.

Women of India have conventionally been engaged in doing house hold work and looking after the comforts and well-being of the family. The corporation plays a vital role in creating awareness in such women mass and content them to suitable economic activities.

In the process, the Corporation has developed various training modules in different trades and a massive training activity is carried out throughout the year in the state. The Corporation has also identified as many as 217 different economic activities either in manufacturing or in service sectors. The women applicant can choose any of these and apply for our bankable finance scheme “Ghar-Divada” in which they get a finance up to Rs.50,000/- through Nationalized Banks, including a subsidy ranging between Rs.7,500/- to Rs.12,500/-.

Above this, the Corporations organizes “Exhibition-cum-Sale” within and outside state and also help market the articles and goods manufactured by our trained women. This has given ample opportunity to the women entrepreneurs and they have achieved remarkable Sales and Good will in their respective fields.

And last but not the least, the Corporation organizes “Mahila Samelans“ and “Mahila Shibir” in order to provide a forum to discuss and share issues related to women development, women health and women social and economic security. These events are chaired by eminent personalities and dignified competent speakers. Hon'ble Chief Minister chairs and addresses the "Mahila Samleans".

The Corporation has a large number of field Officers and Support Staff supervised by the Managing Director and blessed by the Chair person.

Gujarat, growth has not led to more jobs for women: Survey

The number of female workers in Gujarat has steadily declined since 2004

The sharp fall in female work participation rate after India hit the high growth path during 2004-05 has been a matter of intense debate. Now, a new survey compares one of India's prosperous States, Gujarat, with the economically backward Uttar Pradesh, and finds that the



number of female workers in the former has steadily declined since 2004-05 to 2009-10, while in UP there are signs of revival in urban areas.

In rural Gujarat, the female work participation rate fell from 43 per cent in 2005 to 32 per cent in 2010, worsening further to 28 per cent in 2011-12. Urban Gujarat, too, saw a steady but marginal decline.

However, in UP, while there was a decline in numbers in rural areas, signs of revival were evident in urban areas, where female work participation rose from 8.3 per cent to 10 per cent, says the survey.

Call for policy measures

In this context, the survey calls for policy correctives to generate more jobs for women, as growth in itself has not been gender-inclusive, be it in Gujarat, whose annual State domestic product rose by over 10 per cent in the past 10 years, or economically poor UP, one of the most populous States with 37.7 per cent of its population living below the poverty line.

The survey, ‘Low Female Employment in a period of High Growth: Insights from a Primary Survey in Uttar Pradesh & Gujarat’, was commissioned by the International Labour Organisation and conducted by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR).

The survey, which said it chose UP and Gujarat as one State was economically backward while the other was well-off, covered 1,000 rural and urban households in two districts each – Surat and Bhavnagar in Gujarat; Varanasi and Lucknow in UP – based on the highest and lowest female work participation rates.

Different reasons

“In Gujarat, growth has not resulted in more employment opportunities for females, while in Uttar Pradesh, lack of employment opportunities for females can be attributed to general backwardness of the State,” it says.

The factors cited for women pulling out of the work space are reproductive roles, household and care responsibilities, cultural sanctions and patriarchal hierarchies. Continuing in education and migration after marriage were also cited by females as reasons for withdrawal from the labour force.

On the other side, the push factors for women joining the workforce are availability of opportunities, household income, migration, and economic distress.



The survey also showed that the proportion of females in the age-group of 15 to 29 years who were into education was much higher in Uttar Pradesh compared to that in Gujarat where majority of females in this age-group were engaged in economic activities.

Where women work

In rural and urban UP, none of the females with higher secondary education were engaged as agricultural or construction labourers and were mostly into home-based, clerical work or into small-scale trading (commercial shops). In rural Gujarat, higher secondary educated females worked in textile factories or diamond units as daily wage workers, not in agriculture or construction sectors as labourers.

Changing Scenario

Gujarat women Economic Development Corporation Ltd., the destination for the real economic development of women society. The organization was registered under the Societies Registrations Act, 1860, in year 1981 on 19th March, which was later converted into a wholly owned company of the Government of Gujarat. The organization was registered under the companies Act, 1956, as a Public Limited Company and allotted a Certificate of Incorporation on 16th August 1988. The Certificate of Commencement of business was granted to the company on 26th August, 1988. The company has an Authorized Capital of Rs.10,00,00,000/- (Rupees Ten Crores) divided into 1,00,00,000/- (One Crore) Equity Shares of Rs.10/- each.

The company functions in the areas of creating awareness, skill development and self-employment and also in promotion and marketing of goods manufactured by beneficiary women.

The organization is headed by a fulltime Managing Director and team of competent Field workers and support staff under the auspices and guidance of the Chairperson.

Objective

During International Women Year 1975 various issues related to women were studied and serious efforts were planned to address the same. As a **lave** of their Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation Ltd. was established in year 1981.

According to Memorandum of Articles of Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation Ltd. it is the endeavor of the corporation to train and **artist** women for their economic and social oplittment by way of creates facility and giving various aids. The



corporation is **abo alimented** to Work to waves coordination of activities in the field of women development with the involvement of Naos.

In real Terms the Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation is a “true destination” for women development.

1. Ghardivda Bankable Finance Scheme

The scheme primarily aims at economic upliftment of women living below the poverty line. The scheme is being implemented from the year 1996. Women whose annual income is Rs. 36,000/- are considered eligible under the scheme. Qualified women are provided loan amount up to Rs. 50,000/- through Nationalized Banks.

2. General Training

The Scheme primarily aims at providing skill based training to needy women either for traditional or non traditional economic activity. Women living below poverty line between the age of 18 to 35 years are considered eligible. Women are trained in the fields of Computer, soft toys, Embroidery, patch work, ready made garments, Electric Appliances repairing, motor driving etc. Even new trades are entered every year after studying training needs.

3. Mahila Jagruti Shibir

In these Shibir, eminent leaders and experts are invited and every Shibir covers around 300 women.

4. Exhibition-cum-Sale

With a view to providing sustainable marketing support to sell the items produced by women, Exhibition-cum-Sale are being organized by the corporation within and out side the state. Women are provided either table space or stalls in the Exhibition-cum-Sale. Women get an opportunity to sell their products with minimum sales expenditure and get an experience of establishing long term linkages with buyers.

5. Mahila Sammelan

Mostly, these events are organised simultaneously in all districts of the State on a single day. Hon. Chief Minister attends any one Mahila Sammelan of his choice and his address is webcasted/telecasted in rest of the Sammelans.



6. Nari Gaurav Din

Every year, the day of 8th March is celebrated as "Nari Gauvar Din" A formal function is organised at State level and information, education and communication (I.E.C.) activities are carried out pertaining to various Government Programme and Schemes.

7. Vocational training to women in unfavourable circumstances

To impart vocational training to the women in unfavourable circumstances a provision of Rs. 300 lacs has been made in the budget of year 2013-14. The trades like Dress Making, Block Printing, Electrical appliances repairing, Mehndi designing, Embroidery and basic computer training are the popular trades. Total 6000 beneficiaries are trained every year.

8. Mahila Sashaktikaran Kendra

It is envisaged that proper venue for training, conferences, seminars, Exhibition-cum-Sale, women facilitation centers, etc. can be provided at this Center.

9. Exemption on "Ghar Divda" Scheme

1. The loan application received from eligible application are sent to the concurs bank with commendation after security of all documents.
2. One copy of the application is sent to bank and the another copy is verified at office.
3. The applicant are informed when the loan applications are forwarded to bank.
4. A bank statement for subsidiary is sent to bank with every application sponsored or forwarded.
5. Bank veturs the filled in subsidy statement to the Covpovetion after the loan is approved.
6. After the claim are sent to the corporation the subsidies are certified to the account of the to present .
7. Provide the ticket to education: clean water.
8. Support girls and women in crisis.
9. Mentor a girl close to home.
10. Invest in a small business owner.
11. Use your voice to end preventable deaths of mothers and children.
12. Help a new mom.
13. Tell the women in your life that you care.



10. Celebrate Women's Empowerment Fortnight

As a part of this process, Patel announced to celebrate Women's Empowerment Fortnight. The Gujarat Government linked it with India's Independence Day, as the Fortnight will start from August 1 and will end on August 15 to create awareness against crime against women, domestic violence and social evils at district, city level.

11. Mahila Bal Kalyan Department

The occasion should also be used to fight malnutrition, going door-to-door at anganwadis, constructing two lakh toilets in the two years, rehabilitating women bootleggers, free addicts from drinking, hold fairs to sell rakhis prepared by members of Mahila Suraksha Samitis with the help Mahila Bal Kalyan Department, and distribute toys and dress to children at anganwadis.

Education and Economic Development

Number of women heading the households in India is found decreased though female literacy rate is still less than male literacy rate. Urban girls are nearly equal in education like boys however in the rural areas there is still a big gap. On the other hand, some Indian states (like Kerala and Mizoram) have achieved universal female literacy. So, women in such states have high social and economic status. Women literacy rate in India is still less because of the inadequate school facilities, sanitary facilities, increasing crimes against women, shortage of female teachers, gender discrimination in the society, etc. According to the statistics of 2015, it is found that women (above 15 years or older) literacy rate is 60.6% whereas male literacy rate is 81.3%.

Safety Laws for Women in India also applicable to Gujarat state

There is a list of safety laws for women in India working in the field to provide safety to the women from all type of crimes against women. Some safety laws are Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, Special Marriage Act 1954, Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Hindu Widows Remarriage Act 1856, Indian Penal Code 1860, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Maternity Benefit Act 1861, Foreign Marriage Act 1969, Indian Divorce Act 1969, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, Christian Marriage Act 1872, Code of Criminal Procedure 1973, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Married Women's Property Act 1874, Births, Deaths & Marriages Registration Act 1886, Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act 1986, Muslim women (protection of rights on divorce) Act 1986, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987, National Commission for Women Act 1990, Prohibition of Sex Selection Act 1994, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act



2005, Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place Act 2013, etc.

Another Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2015 has been passed replacing the existing Indian juvenile delinquency law of 2000 (Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000). This act was passed by the Lok Sabha on 7th of May in 2015 and however, by the Rajya Sabha on 22nd of December in 2015. This act is passed to lower down the juvenile age from 18 to 16 years in cases of heinous offense (especially after the release of Nirbhaya's case accused juvenile).

CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do, and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. There are several principles defining women's empowerment such as, for one to be empowered, they must come from a position of disempowerment.

Empowerment of Gujarati women, particularly rural women has become an important issue in the strategies of balanced development with social justice. Economic empowerment results in women's ability to influence or make a right decision, increase self-confidence better status and role in household etc.

Women's empowerment and achieving gender equality is essential for our society to ensure the **sustainable development** of the country. Many world leaders and scholars have argued that sustainable development is impossible without gender equality and women's empowerment. Sustainable development accepts environmental protection, social and economic development, and without women's empowerment, women wouldn't feel equally important to the process of development as men. It is widely believed that, the full participation of both men and women is critical for development. Only acknowledging men's participation will not be beneficial to sustainable development. In the context of women and development, empowerment must include more choices for women to make on their own. Without gender equality and empowerment, the country could not be just, and social change wouldn't occur. Therefore, scholars agree that women's empowerment plays a huge role in development and is one of the significant contributions of development. Without the equal inclusion of women in development, women would not be able to benefit or contribute to the development of the country.



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