

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEXTILE INDUSTRY

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"The Indian concept of women has been governed by two parallel currents-the visible one of women in a subordinate role, the *abla* (weak one), and underlying it, that of women as a symbol of energy, the active principle" observes Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the third Prime Minister of India. This is true for rural women, who for centuries have taken up the gigantic task of being breadwinners and homemakers of their families. Rural women are endowed with great potentialities and competencies. They work extremely hard, fending for their families, which in most cases also include their husbands. However, the perpetual non-rewarding effort has only tended to bring down their motivation and self-esteem.

Status and development of women influence the country's development as they not only constitute half of its population but also influence growth of the remaining half of the population. As in Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's words-In order to awaken the people it is the women who has to be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation also moves.

The socio-economic conditions of the rural women are very poor. Hence, there is great scope for developing agro-based enterprises for employment generation. There is abundant skill among the village people specially the women, for improving the economic condition of the farm families.

Women's work, particularly among the

poor, is a matter of economic survival. It can also have other facets. A women's decision-making freedom is linked to whether, she is engaged in gainful economic activity or next. Her lower status in the family is related to her exclusion from economic activity and economic contribution helps women gain more power in decision-making. They enjoy more privileges with regard to their own earned money than they had been not earning. Generally this is reflected in relationships between the sexes in the family. Statistics have revealed that an employed mother's role is greater in making family decisions in areas like investment and budgeting. Their jobs have made them economically independent.

Women not only constitute approximately half of the human population, in general, but also affect the growth of the remaining half. Unfortunately, in India women trail behind men in almost all sectors. The main reason for this lag is that for too long women have been economically dependent on men, thereby deprived of self-esteem and confidence. Therefore, it becomes obvious that if status of woman in our country has to be raised they must be provided with sufficient opportunities to achieve economic independence. In today's world of economic liberalization it becomes further important for women to take up employment not only to meet the high cost of living but also to enhance their self-esteem and confidence.

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Work Participation and Status of Women:

Women actively participate in production activities in order to achieve economic security for the family. Two thirds of all work in this world is done by women and they receive only one tenth of the world's income. Yet the bulk of these women are not considered as part of the work force. This is particularly true for rural women. As they are not considered part of the work force. Some of the newer textile industries had shown a preference for women workers in certain regions, at the same time women were being thrown out of employment in many of the traditional industries, such as the cotton textile industry in India. In addition the introduction of a new technology or a new labour process often results in the substitution of male for female workers, therefore, women have to depend for their livelihood on the informal, unorganised sectors of the economy characterised by very low earning and insecurity of employment.

Constraints Faced by Rural Women in Their Economic Activities :

Some of the constraints faced by women at large in matters of securing employment or better life are as follows:

- Vested interest to exploit women's work cheaply.
- Women's limited skills and exposure.
- Women's incompetence in formal dealings.
- Insensitivity of policy makers.
- Erosion of women's economic activities.
- Insufficient collective strength.

Based on the experiences of farm extension workers, field advisers and rural farm women in the Asia Pacific, the following are the general constraints faced by them :-

- High illiteracy rates and poor living conditions among rural women.

- Lack of leadership and inadequate participation in the organizational and economic affairs of rural development programmes.
- Absence of property inheritance rights, restriction on acquiring membership of development programmes.
- Inadequate health care services in rural areas.
- Inadequate water supply for household and farm operations.
- Lack of appropriate technology aimed at reducing the physical burden of rural women.
- Inadequate access to credit and other inputs and services.
- Lack of female farm extension workers.
- Lack of marketing facilities and opportunities.
- Traditional, religious, social and cultural obstacles.
- Less participation in decision-making even within the household.
- Male migration/urban drift which increases pressure on women.
- Lack of opportunities to improve socio-economic status of rural women.
- Lack of skills and attitudes in leadership and management development.
- Lack of secretariat supporting functions for women's organisations and allocation of funds for them in cooperative organizations.

Participation of Rural Women in Textile Industry :

The Indian Textile Industry is one of the most important segments of Indian Economy. The Industry is self-sufficient in production of raw material and the whole range of textiles from fiber to finished products in all their vibrant colours, textures etc.

In our country due to very high population growth the rising rate of unemployment is a major problem. So it is practically not feasible to provide jobs to every woman who

aspires for it. Therefore, in such a situation propagating the concept of women entrepreneurship becomes quite imperative. It means to say that proper guidance and information should be provided to women so that they may set up their own small ventures as a means of self-employment. Traditionally, dyeing, printing, stitching, making handicrafts, weaving carpets and durries etc. are some of the areas where rural women seem to be quite interested in providing their excellence. So they can choose any of these fields to start their own small-scale business, provided sufficient knowledge about their particular field of interest is easily available to them.

The quality of Indian textiles too is comparable to the best in the world. The Industry also can boast of a vast part of highly trained textile technologists, traditional skills in designing and capable of delivering the very best designs for which there are a growing demanding in the international market. The industry is globally competitive with a lot of inherent advantages.

Rural women can be engaged in a wide range of income-generating textile related activities. Special attention to the basic requirements of women as homemakers and also as income generator for the family is essential. Above all poor rural women need help in forming organization for self-reliant, self managed rural development. Women entrepreneurs of rural areas need to be encouraged to set up cottage/ small-scale textile units by utilising existing natural and human resources. This would help to generate extra income.

Women in Agro Based Fiber Cottage Industry :

Agro based fibers are obtained from various sources. These can be successfully used to produce a number of diversified value added products i.e. decorative and

furnishing fabric, floor coverings and mats, bags, shopping bags etc.

Agro based fibers are available in abundance in rural surroundings. These can be exploited further, for the preparation of various handicrafts or textile items.

A rural woman of India is a subject of our concern. We can provide them simple household technologies so that they can empower themselves, the use of agro-based fibers is one such field. These fibers can be retted easily and then can make various handicrafts items during their leisure time. Other members of family may also help her. In village itself co-operative can be established in order to find out good outlets for the sale of handicraft items.

Simple and basic knowledge and facilities of spinning and handloom weaving can also be provided to rural women. Thus, by using the agro based fibers or their blends with conventional fibers (cotton, wool, rayon etc.) textile articles can be prepared. In the today's world of fashion these could fetch a good market and thus use of agro-based fibers may prove to be a good cause for income generation to rural women.

Contribution of Rural Women in Sericulture :

Sericulture is one of the most promising activity in rural India. It is hundred percent labour-oriented among agro-based industries more than 60 percent of women force engaged in various activities of sericulture. Women's contribution in silkworm rearing is of critical importance. Women are best suited for sericulture as it involves rearing, feeding, cleaning and harvesting of silk worms, which need much care. Women can perform these activities without male support. Yet their participation and contribution is not adequately recognized.

Sericulture being a agro-based rural industry is highly suitable to the countries

having an agricultural base and problems of providing employment to the rural land less labourers. In fact the silk production has brought advantages to small and marginal farmers in the developing countries. It is mainly rural and labour intensive industry requiring relatively low investment and offering high profit potential and foreign exchange.

Women contribute, substantially towards the sericulture industry and transform green mulberry leaves into elegant shiny thread of silk. Women contribute substantially in all the sericulture activities like silkworm rearing, reeling of cocoons, twisting, weaving, printing and dyeing. Silkworm rearing needs enormous attentions; women can only impart care and delicate handling that. Women proved her excellence in every field.

The level of participation of women is very high when compared to males. In the marginal and small farmers households, sericulture had only partially replaced agriculture and thus most of the rearing work for women was an additional workload. However, generally women do not feel burdened by this additional work because of the additional income it earns for the household. Eighty percent of women surveyed opined that sericulture was a lighter activity when compared to agricultural activities and thus more preferable. Other reason for preferring sericulture was the steady and definite income it earns in a short time. The sericulture activity in rural areas was given utmost importance due to the employment it ensures throughout the year.

Contribution of Rural Women in Dyeing and Printing Units :

From very early times dyeing and printing make an important contribution to fabric decoration by way of imparting many

beautiful colours and patterns. Tie and dye, batik, hand screen printing, block printing etc. are some of the techniques of dyeing and printing which do not require the use of large and complex machineries and equipments. In order to be a successful entrepreneur in this field only women's creativity and drive to initiate are the major traits required. Women are the source of the traditional knowledge. Since, they are the major workers, they have developed and acquired a tremendous amount of knowledge about their natural resources, agro ecosystem, animal husbandry and livestock management practices. A dyeing and printing unit not only provides a means of livelihood to the rural women but also offers lots of exciting challenges in the ever changing, fashion market because there is no dearth of new ideas that can be tried out by varying combination of designs and colours. Since, hand made fabric has always been a hot favourite, compared to a machine made fabric, so there is not much competition either to be feared about.

Development Programmes for Rural Women :

The centre of women and enterprise offers the Community Entrepreneurs Programme (CEP). This programme exclusively focuses on women belonging to very low income categorises, particularly these transitioning from welfare to self-sufficiency. Through a careful, comprehensive programme design, the Community Entrepreneurs Programmes seeks to create an educational environment where the women entrepreneurs can gather to learn, establish networks, and provide mutual support to one another. The Community Entrepreneurs Programme is in its pilot phase. The programme aims to :-

(1) Make opportunities of new business growth available to those who need it most-

underemployed or unemployed women who have been dreaming of running their own business and have not had an opportunity these dreams.

(2) Help women build strong business and life management skills that will enable them to become leaders in their work and personal lives and become strong role models for their children and their communities.

(3) Empower women to use entrepreneurship as a strategy to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to improve the security of their families.

It has been observed for quite a long time that successful women entrepreneurs are not ready to help other women due to various reasons like lack of security, competition from same gender etc. Gender afflictions, discrimination and deprivation syndromes have deleterious consequences on women entrepreneurship.

Funding Agencies :

A number of funding agencies can support setting up textile enterprises in rural areas. Needless to say that all of them will see practical feasibility of units in addition to guaranty and repayment schedule. Some of these agencies are as under :-

- SIDBI - Small Industry Development Board of India
- Nationalized banks
- District cooperative banks
- NABARD- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
- State Finance Corporation.
- KVIC- Khadi and Village Industries Commission

Training Organizations :

Proper planning, orientation and training to set up small-scale textile processing units are necessary. Following agencies/organizations help in training of entrepreneurs :-

- Small Industries Development Organizations

- Small Industries Service Institute
- Small Industry Expansion Training Institute
- Poly-techniques
- Khadi and Village Industries Commission
- District Industries Centre
- Handicrafts Institute
- Home Science Colleges
- Universities and Research Institutes
- Non Government Organizations

A variety of programmes are being undertaken, and a multitude of institutions exist in private as well as public sectors for the cause of promoting women entrepreneurship. Yet the pace of development of women entrepreneurship is deplorable. One cannot be complacent with a few achievements we had so far. Even these few programmes are not free from vexatious problems, irritants and criticism. Some of the constraints in women entrepreneurship have been discussed below.

Development of Women Entrepreneurship in India :

Schools and colleges as well as universities with special emphasis on women :-

- The Government policy-makers have to re-evaluate the strategies on women education and their entrepreneurial development and it should be planned and implemented.
- To support and supplement women entrepreneurship, it should be in the form of training skill up gradation, managerial skills, production and marketing along with development programmes like health and nutrition, women and child welfare etc.
- Women should be made aware of various credit facilities, financial incentives and subsidies.
- To make women entrepreneurship development sustainable, a constant re-enforcement is required.

- Though, it is necessary to help them, to imitative their enterprise a constant follow-up and liberal financial support should be ensured to enable them in functioning and smooth running of their enterprise.
- For effective sustainable development and technology transfer to women entrepreneurs, proper training based on scientific inputs, suitable products identification, market survey, project formulation and necessary approvals from the government at the right time with less of legal formalities, soft recovery rules are of utmost importance.
- To over come the problem of procurement of raw material to women entrepreneurs and also the problems of brokers and middlemen and problems in marketing of products of women entrepreneurs, the government has to give a helping hand especially in this connection.

CONCLUSION

Women have the potential and will to establish and mange enterprises of there own. What they need is encouragement and support from the family members, Govt., societies, male counter parts. With the right assistance from varied group mentioned above, they can join the main stream of national economy and thereby contribute to the economic programmes.

In a country like India, development of local enterprises would improve the economy, by facilitating a balanced regional development and checking migration of talent to urban areas.

The establishment of many entrepreneurial development institutes like Entrepreneurial Development Institute of India, National Science and Technology Entrepreneurship Development Board of India and Technical consultancy organizations at many states clearly indicated Government's recognition of the need for entrepreneurial development. Rural women are deeply involved in productive activities and are also repositories most of indigenous knowledge. By making their own decisions they reflect their strong will and enterprising nature.

Rural women are harassed by the gender bias, though most of them are the breadwinners of their families. It is indeed ironical that though they have the responsibility of earning money of their family, the authority of spending is vested in the male members of their families. Another problem faced by these entrepreneurs is the means of obtaining finance. Very often, they are not given financial support from banks due to their gender. There are not technical institutions that provide technical training exclusively for women. Marketing takes great effort, skills, manipulation and publicity. Women in this region need to be specially equipped in this skill also.

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