

# Asian Resonance

## Women Empowerment: A Self Respect and Self Dignity for Women in India

(A case of Kansabel Block in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh)

### Abstract

It has been experienced in the past that women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They were deprived of owning the property of their parents. They did not have voting rights, they had no freedom to choose their work or job. In some states of India, they were not allowed to come out of their houses. They had been locked in the cocoons of their own houses. Since India has the system of having male-headed families, the females members have almost nil rights. However, now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have. The author intends to discuss the various issues related to the Empowerment of Women and to suggest measures for achieving this end taking a case study of Kansabel Block in Jashpur District.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Social, Mentality, Cultural

### Introduction

As regards the concept of the origin goes back to the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourses. Empowerment can be used in various fields such as social, economic, political, cultural, and most importantly, the empowerment of women in terms of mind set, the mentality, the thinking pattern or the psychology.

**Different Levels of Empowerment-** There are mainly three levels of empowerment.

- Empowerment on the individual,
- Empowerment on the group.
- Empowerment at the society/community- level and the interaction between these.

The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own values and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal.

The group level deals with the collective action and sense of belongingness and cooperation that women experience together, in a group.

The societal level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social environment, the societal norms and regulations on what is possible and impossible for women to do, and how women should behave etc.

These different levels are seen as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal levels too. Women who are empowered on an individual level will most likely go on and affect the other levels. Empowerment on a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self esteem and sense of cooperation.

### History behind the Women Empowerment in India-

The status of Women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few Millennium. In early Vedic period Women enjoyed equal status with men. However, later the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500 B.C., the situation worsened with invasion of Mughals and later on by European invaders. Some reformatory movements by Guru Nanak, Jainism, Raja ram mohan Rai, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Pandita Rama Bai and others did give some relief. It is not that Britishers didn't do any thing for improving the condition of women. Some laws were enacted such an "Abolition of practice of Sati", Widow Remarriage Act 1856 etc.

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The real change came after independence. Constitution of India guarantees equality to women. There are other articles too which ensure rights of women e.g. no discrimination by the state equality of opportunity etc. Feminist activism picked up momentum in India during later 1970's. Later on Many NGO groups have been involved in working for the Empowerment of women.

## Steps taken for Women Empowerment-

The Constitution Framers were very much conscious of the problems of women empowerment hence they ensured that the Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. Moreover the Constitution also empowers the states to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

The real impetus for this movement was gained when under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, as Prime Minister, a scheme known as Indira MahilaYojana was launched. UNDP also incorporated issues of women upliftment as Primary objective. Various Schemes were later on launched for the empowerment of women such as RashtriyaMahilaKosh, MahilaSamridhiYojana, Self help groups at Panchayat level and many more.

The establishment of National Women's Commission and State Women's Commissions were important milestones in the direction of Women Empowerment in India. The National Policy for the Empowerment of women (2001) was an important step taken by the Government of the time for accelerating the pace of women empowerment. The policy was aimed at ensuring women empowerment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women. So that they could realize their full potentialities. The policy assured equal access to women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economical life of the nation. The National Policy also aims at Strengthening legal system for eliminating discrimination against Women. It also visualizes strengthening partnership with Civil Society, particularly Women's organizations. States have also taken various measures for empowerment of women.

## A Case study:

Kansabel block is a semi - developed block in the district of Jashpur, C.G. The area is enladed with vast natural resources. The forests are very thick, hence there is plenty of minor forest produces. There are a variety of Government Programmes taking place in the area, to which many people are responding positively and some few of them seem to be unaware of the schemes.

The author intends to throw out the outcome of the study, which he conducted in the months of November-December 2013. He took up 05 villages, namely, Kansabel, Tangargaon, Bhainsburh, Shantinagar and Sihardand. It is to be noted that the village Kansabel is a centre place for marketing, where all the villages in the block, flock together and have exchange of products, ideas, culture etc. While

other villages are adjacent to the Block having a distance of 02 to 05 K.M. from Kansabel.

## Methodology

The following were the objectives for this study:

### Objectives

- To collect information and analyse them as to how far the women folk in the villages have been empowered in terms of education, economic, social and political aspects.
- To suggest and recommend for future action plan.

### Research Design

The present study is based on a Descriptive Design.

### Sampling

The samples were taken 30 women from 5 villages each i.e. Kansabel, Tangargaon, Bhainsburh, Shantinagar and Sihardand to represent the Universe. There are 235 households in total in the above mentioned villages, and 150 women out of 235 HHs have been taken into study. The sample comes to 42.55% of the households under study.

### Primary Sources

#### Individual Interview:

The author has conducted a survey of 150 women with the help of surveyors taking 30 women from each village. They were interviewed about their family status, their economic possessions and status, their educational and cultural life patterns, government schemes etc.

#### Observation

While collecting the data through the above methods, non-participant observation method was used to get more insights and to supplement the above data.

### Secondary Sources

The data from the secondary sources were collected on the concept and context of the developmental activities. Help was taken from the published books and journals, unpublished articles and documents. The records of the concerned Government Department at the District Level were also referred for the above purpose.

### Limitation of the Study

The present piece of research has certain limitations which the author feels free to share with:

- The non-availability of the women folk in the villages sometimes prolonged the process of data collection. The surveyor has to visit the same village again and again.
- Some of the women were not opened with regard to their socio-economic status.
- The author did not get enough time to visit the villages and interact much with the women.

### Demographic Profile:

The universe comprises of 365 households of 05 villages in Kansabel Block. The Total population of the 05 villages is 3337, out of which 1756 (51.72%) male population and 1611(48.28%) female members reside. The sex ratio of the total universe is 933, less than the national sex ratio i.e. 940 as per the census 2011.

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Villages	Total No. of Households	Total Population	Male Population	Female Population	Sex ratio
Kansabel	153	1028	528 (51.36%)	500 (48.64%)	947/1000
Tangargaon	65	458	240 (52.4%)	218 (47.59%)	908/1000
Bhainsburh	97	679	356 (52.43%)	323 (47.56%)	907/1000
Shantinagar	52	419	213 (50.83%)	206 (49.17%)	967/1000
Sihardand	98	753	389 (51.66%)	364 (48.33%)	936/1000
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>3337</b>	<b>1726 (51.72%)</b>	<b>1611 (48.28%)</b>	<b>933/1000</b>

Source: Primary survey in 2013

### The Literacy level of the women respondents:

The literacy level of the respondents has been found out to be very high as it reads to 70.66%. As the table indicates that 29.33% of the women respondents are illiterate, while 32.66% of them have completed their primary schools, followed by 23.33% respondents have passed Middle schools. 10.66% of the women respondents have completed their high school level education, while 4% of them have done their graduation. It has been found out that out of 29.33% of the illiterate women, around 20-30 women attend the night adult schools run in the villages and know to write their names. It is a very good sign of the women empowerment in terms of the literacy/education.

### Distribution of women respondents as per their Literacy level

Village/Educational level	Illiterate	Primary School	Middle school	High School	Graduate	Post graduate	Total
Kansabel	02	12	09	04	03	00	30
Tangargaon	10	08	08	03	01	00	30
Bhainsburh	07	05	11	05	02	00	30
Shantinagar	11	12	03	04	00	00	30
Sihardand	14	12	04	00	00	00	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>44 (29.33%)</b>	<b>49 (32.66%)</b>	<b>35 (23.33%)</b>	<b>16 (10.66%)</b>	<b>06 (4%)</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>150 (100%)</b>

Source: Primary survey in 2013

### Distribution of women respondents as per their nature of houses

Villages	kaccha	Semi-pacca	Pacca	Total
Kansabel	05	17	08	30

Villages	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Tangargaon	10	16	04	30
Bhainsburh	05	18	07	30
Shantinagar	10	15	05	30
Sihardand	12	15	03	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>42 (28%)</b>	<b>81 (54%)</b>	<b>27 (18%)</b>	<b>150 (100%)</b>

Source: Primary survey in 2013

From the above table it is very clear that 28% respondents have pure kaccha houses to dwell in, whereas 54% respondents do have semi-kaccha houses, while only 18% respondents have pacca houses. This nature of houses also reflects the empowerment of the people in general and when a woman is dwelling in the pacca houses or in the semi-pacca houses, the mentality of the woman becomes different. The women who live in the semi-pacca or pacca houses they feel dignified. Their social status becomes high. Others also consider them as to have higher standard. As per the survey work it is found out that 72% women respondents do feel the difference in terms of living standard.

### Economic Status of the women respondents

Villages	Women working in the govt. sector	Women working in the private sector	Women in self business	Women in agriculture	Women in husband working in the govt. sector	Women in husband working in the private sector	Women in husband working as self business	Total
Kansabel	02	00	00	05	12	03	08	30
Tangargaon	00	02	02	21	01	01	03	30
Bhainsburh	01	03	00	22	03	01	00	30
Shantinagar	00	00	03	10	04	05	08	30
Sihardand	00	00	00	17	06	05	02	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>03 (2%)</b>	<b>05 (3.33%)</b>	<b>05 (3.33%)</b>	<b>75 (50%)</b>	<b>26 (17.33%)</b>	<b>15 (10%)</b>	<b>21 (14%)</b>	<b>150 (100%)</b>

Source: Primary survey in 2013

From the above table it is encouraging to find that 3 (2%) women are working in the govt. jobs while 5 (3.33%) women are working in the private salaried jobs and 5 (3.33%) are involved in the self-business of their own. This implies that they are very much empowered because they are not dependent on their husbands.

The observation goes to find out that 75 (50%) of the respondents are engaged in the agricultural work with their husbands. They are cooperative in stages of cultivation work, which makes them self-reliant. Again 26 (17.33%) women respondents opined that their husbands are busy with the government jobs, and they help out their husbands in terms of assisting them, looking after the household affairs. Similarly, 15 (10%) women respondents' husbands are engaged in the private sectors and 21 (14%) of the women's husbands are involved in the self business.

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The whole scenario depicts a picture of empowerment of the women in these sample villages. Besides, the women have formed the Self\_Help Groups in all the villages. They are aware of the government schemes in the villages, about the health and literacy programmes etc. In every village, the women folk have formed a committee for the welfare of the villages. Now they are aware of the importance of the education, and they are sending their offsprings to the schools.

## Problems on the road to Women Empowerment:

In spite of the various measures taken up by the government after Independence, the Women haven't been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in India occupying highest offices of President, Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, occupying highest positions in the Corporate Sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women.

The female foeticides is not an uncommon phenomenon. The male female ratio though improved over last few years is still far from satisfactory. It is 940 Women per 1000 men for India as per the census 2011, while in some of the states it is as much lower as 877. These are the states where female foeticide is maximum. Even in the sample villages average sex-ratio is just 933/1000, which is less than the national sex ratio.

The female literacy rate is also lower than the male literacy rate. The ground reality is deprivation, deterioration and exploitation of women specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sections of the society. The Urban elite class women have no doubt been benefitted by the efforts of women empowerment. In spite of reservation being granted to women in Panchayat elections after 73rd and 74th Constitution amendment, in many Panchayats the male domination does not allow them to function independently.

## Social Empowerment

Under the social empowerment of women steps needs to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities even in the sample villages of Kansabel blocks.

A programme for checking the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV / AIDS and infections / communicable diseases like T.B. need to be launched. Women face high risk of malnutrition hence focussed attention would have to be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life cycle.

The problem in the country and Chhattisgarh as well as in the sample villages under study is serious about the women belonging to disadvantaged groups. They are the most exploited lot. The Social activists should keep a vigil on the atrocities committed on women belonging to weaker sections and help them to fight the legal battle for obtaining justice. Government Schemes need to be introduced for helping women who are victims of marital violence, who are deserted and those engaged in sex professions.

Awareness programmes need to be organised for creating awareness among women Especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. The social stigma like child marriage. Female foeticide, child abuse and child prostitution must be eradicated immediately. Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on drop - out rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the drop- out rates.

## Role of NGO's

Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of Women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations / NGO's have gained increased attention in the field from grass- roots level to national & international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGO's is open, transparent and personal. So, they are more effective in this direction. They organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the awakening of the masses. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self - employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

## Conclusion-

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st Century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a healthy environment in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social activities. Politically also women have to be empowered. This will be possible only when all people in the administration should have the positive mentality towards women. The women have to be given a dignified place in the human world of thinking. They have to be respected first, and then to think about their empowerment.

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