



Research Paper

Women's Development Through Ngos in India: A Social Work Lens

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Abstract

The post-independence period in South India witnessed significant socio-economic and political transformations. While strides were made towards gender equality, persistent challenges compelled social workers to actively engage in initiatives aimed at promoting the holistic development of women. Post-independence, South India grappled with traditional gender roles, societal norms, and cultural practices that influenced the status of women. The initial years saw efforts to reform laws and promote gender equality, but persistent challenges remained. Social work emerged as a crucial force to address these challenges and foster the development of women. Despite legislative reforms, women in South India faced multifaceted challenges. Gender-based violence, limited access to education and healthcare, economic disparities, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms were persistent issues. Social workers recognized the urgent need to address these challenges comprehensively. This concept paper explores the pivotal role of social work in fostering women's development in South India in the post-independence era. It examines the historical context of women's status, identifies the persistent challenges faced by women, and elucidates the multifaceted interventions initiated by social workers to promote empowerment.

Key Words: Women Development, Social Work, and Role of NGOs

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I. INTRODUCTION

The socio-political status of women during the pre-and post-independence of India has historical events that stand to indicate that their socio-political status in medieval times was severely jeopardized due to several obnoxious social evils such as Child Marriage, Sati, and Polygamy. Despite these severe shortcomings, however, the 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a tremendous transformation in the socio-political status of women. (Sudalai Moni, 2020). The participation of Indian women in politics in the modern era started in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. British imperialism in India profoundly influenced the political engagement of both elite and non-elite women folk during this period. In general, women also participated and fought against the British colonialists in the late 18th & and 19th centuries and other such revolts in the 19th century. (Roy, 1999). Since the political system in Ancient and Medieval India was based on monarchy, there were no legislatures, political parties, diplomatic relations, and International Conferences. In such situations, giving voting rights or freedom of contesting elections and holding political posts to common women did not arise. During Modern times, the early social reformers focused their special attention on the social status of women. For instance, Raja Ram Mohan forcibly attacked the inhuman practice imposed upon women in the shape of Sati and the unhappy treatment meted out to widows, Resultantly Lord William Bentinck passed "Regulation No XVII" on 4th December 1829, which declared Sati as illegal and a punishable offense by criminal courts. (Pandey, 1990). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar took a leading part in promulgating the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, Keshab Chandra Sen against early marriage, facilitated the enactment of the Native Marriage Act, known as the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, also set an example. Social reformers like Ravinder Nath Tagore, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Annie Besant, E.V. Ramasamy, Narayana Guru, also took the lead in the upliftment of women. In 1921 women got the right to vote in the election of Madras Legislative Council. Gradually, Indian Legislature one after another started enfranchising women of their respective provinces on the same term as men. (Asthana, 1974). After Independence, provision was made in the Indian constitution to provide equal rights and opportunities for social, economic, and political development and betterment of living for women. With the advent of Independence, Indian women were guaranteed political equality with men. The Fundamental Rights enshrined in Article 14, 15,

and 16 guarantees the principle of equality before the law, equality of sexes, and equal opportunities to all citizens of India in all lifestyles. Article 325 makes no special electoral on the grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex. Article 326 emphasizes that election to the legislative assemblies of the state were to be held based on adult franchise. In addition to this, various initiatives have been undertaken to bring improvements in the socio-economic status and empowerment of women. Article 39 (a) states, the state shall direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women, equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, and article 39 (d) equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 provides for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief, and Article 51 A (e) provides that it shall be a fundamental duty to every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. These provisions and Fundamental Rights envision a new socio-political order on equality and equity of women in India. (Sudalai Moni, 2020)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment in general and poor women in particular is the thrust area of development initiatives in India today. Empowerment of women is a process whereby women can organize themselves in Community based participatory groups to increase their self-confidence, self-reliance, assert make prudent choices and control resources, which will assist in challenging and eliminating their subordination thereby, bringing a beneficial social-economic and political change. (Khan, 2014). Women's involvement in socio-political life is a desideratum for the progress of not only the women folk but also the development of the nation. (Sudalai Moni, 2020)

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE

After independence, Indian women slowly began to realize that the actualization of promises of equality was not a smooth process, and the complicated and intricate pattern of politics became clear with its variations of castes, languages, religions, and divisions of family structures and cultural traditions. Indian women thus realized the barriers of caste, class, language, religion, and the consequent complexity of these issues and the difficulties encountered in handling them. Participation in the freedom struggle had not generated any controversy on gender roles. The assimilation of women in the struggle to free the nation had given them confidence and access to positions of power and responsibility. Still, the positions of power were not easy reach. (Desai, 2000). Of late, there has been a tremendous change in the women's literacy ratio, which has increased multi-fold compared to men, but still, women are kept in the backyard. Modern India witnesses the active political participation of women in various affairs through the Panchayat Raj system. Undeniably their lifestyle also has changed, which enhanced their social status. The Women's Reservation Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2008, granting them 33 percent reservation of seats, both in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies across India. (Sudalai Moni, 2020). The Empowerment of women in the economic, social, and political arena has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century. It is central to the issue of equality, justice, and liberation in the country. Women constitute almost half of the world's population. However, they are the most deprived and unproductive members of the economy of many world nations. Promoting various income-generating activities, especially among rural women, is perceived as one of the most powerful mediums to resolve several socio-economic and even political problems. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building, leading to greater participation and greater decision-making power. The process of empowerment strengthens one's innate abilities through acquiring knowledge, power, and experience. (Murugan, 2000)

Social work is a profession that aims to enhance the well-being of individualities, families, and communities, and it plays a pivotal part in addressing issues related to women's development. Then are some crucial aspects of the relationship between social work and women's development.

ADVOCACY FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Social workers frequently engage in advocacy, and sweats to promote gender equivalency and challenge discriminative practices and programs that affect women. They work towards creating a more just and indifferent society by championing women's rights in colorful spheres, including education, employment, and healthcare.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Social workers play a vital part in empowering women by furnishing support, coffers, and chops necessary for them to overcome challenges and achieve their pretensions. This commission may involve promoting profitable independence, enhancing educational openings, and fostering confidence.

ADDRESSING GENDER-GROUNDED VIOLENCE

Social workers work to address and help gender-grounded violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and mortal trafficking. They give comfort, Support, and advocacy for survivors, while also working to raise mindfulness and change societal status towards violence against women.

COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND GENDER ROLES

Social workers contribute to the development of communities by fastening women's requirements and enterprises. This may involve enforcing programs that enhance women's access to healthcare, education and profitable openings, eventually contributing to the overall development of the community.

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND GENDER ROLES

Social workers frequently address issues related to family dynamics and gender places, aiming to challenge traditional morals that may limit women's openings. They work with families to promote further in different connections and produce surroundings where women can thrive.

POLICY ADVOCACY

Social workers engage in policy advocacy to impact and shape programs those impact women's lives. This may include championing for laws that promote gender equivalency, plant programs that support work-life balance, and social safety nets that profit women and their families.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Social workers fete the intersectionality of women's individualities, considering factors similar as race, race, socioeconomic status, and sexual exposure. This approach helps address the unique challenges faced by women with different backgrounds.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Social workers play a part in educating communities about gender issues and conducting training programs that promote mindfulness and perceptivity to gender-related issues. This education can contribute to changing societal stations and fostering a more inclusive and probative terrain for women.

ROLE OF NGOs TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women's Empowerment has been the primary focus for both the government and most NGOs. Voluntary action promoted by NGOs engaged in development plays a significant role rural development Organizations (NGOs). The various roles of NGSs toward women's empowerment are described below :-

- Educating the Rural Women
- Supplementation of Government Efforts
- Efforts Organizing the Rural Women
- Building various Models and Experiment
- Ensure Women's Participation in Their empowerment.
- Mobilizing the optimum Resources
- Promoting Rural Leadership
- Representing the Rural Women
- Promoting Technology in Rural areas
- Providing effective & and efficient Training to Rural Women.
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Impact assessment

SELF-HELP GROUPS AND WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

The main model of intervention for the majority of Indian NGOs working in rural areas on issues of gender and poverty is the self-help group. It is a form of savings –based microfinance, which is essentially a mutual-based model aimed primarily at women and is now the preferred model for government, NGOs, and multilateral agencies for community intervention in India. In 2006 there were over two million SHGs across India, with 33 million members and delivering services to well over 100 million people. The basis of the SHG is that 10 to 20 women come together to form a thrift and credit group : each member puts a small amount of money each week into a common fund, and after a period of six to twelve months, small loans from the fund are then made to selected members, based on their savings level and a needs assessment. This fund is often supplemented on a matching basis from additional resources from an NGO, either as a loan or grant or by loans from commercial or state financial institutions facilitated by the NGO. These loans are then applied to a range of uses, which are ideally for productive purposes in that they will be able to generate additional income for the work of NGOs in India to enable repayments. They can also be made for necessary consumption purposes such as health costs and school fees, as well as daily expenses during an emergency or unemployment. The model meets the demand of poor women for access to affordable credit, and it enables a broader social intermediation function by the NGO, fostering the notions of self-help and self-reliance that should lead to sustainability. (Kilby, 2011).

A study was done at Kerala, India, with the aim to assess the role of Self-Help Groups in empowering rural women and to identify the major constraints faced by women. Kollam, a traditional industrial district in Kerala was selected for the study. Twenty-four Governments SHGs and 24 non-governmental SHGs, comprising groups with enterprises and without enterprises were identified. 480 women members formed the experimental group and 237 rural women, who are not members of SHG, were the control group. Appropriate tools were used

to conduct the study. Self Help Groups without enterprises were found to be less empowered, socially and economically than those with enterprises. Government and non-government SHGs showed significant differences in economic, social, and political roles. The study revealed that micro-enterprises are a viable pathway for improving economic status.

The development of women Entrepreneurship particularly in rural areas is an indication of social transformation and the breaking of traditional taboos. The capacity-building programmes provided by non-governmental organizations have transformed middle-class women into innovative, hardworking, achievable women entrepreneurs. Though the nongovernmental organizations and governmental support is limited in many ways but play a crucial role in empowering women in rural Governmental Organizations in Empowering Women in India "has mainly emphasized the role of non-governmental organizations in empowering women in rural areas of Villupuram distri of Tamil Nadu, India for understanding the crucial role of nongovernmental organizations. Three non-governmental organizations from the Villupuram district, particularly which are providing capacity-building, training to women entrepreneurs have been chosen. They are :

1. Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG)
2. Community Action for Rural Development Society (CARDS)
3. Rural Education Action for Liberation (REAL)

According to the World Bank, investing more in the business of women rather than in men leads to greater development of a nation. Empowering women realized the importance of women's inequalities and reducing poverty. The government has realized the importance of women's entrepreneurship. As a result, it offers a variety of programmes for women entrepreneurs. Such entrepreneurs are helped by the Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women, which in turn is implemented by various non-governmental organizations. (Maduraiveeran G, 2020)

II. CONCLUSION

The cooperative efforts of social works and Non-governmental associations (NGOs) play a vital part in advancing women's development. Social workers, who are driven by a commitment to

social justice, work directly with individuals and communities, addressing the unique challenges women face. NGOs serve as pivotal agents for change by enforcing programs, championing policy reforms, and mobilizing resources to support women's empowerment. Together, social workers and NGOs contribute to creating a terrain that fosters gender equivalency, dismantles discriminatory practices, and empowers women economically, socially, and politically. By addressing issues like gender-based violence, access to education, healthcare, and profitable openings, they produce a positive impact. The social workers and NGOs amplify the comprehensive approach to women's development through their interventions, reaching a broader followership and driving systemic change. Through education, advocacy, and support services, this collaborative effort strives to create a society where women aren't only defended from discrimination but are also active participants in shaping their destinies. In the face of complex challenges, the combined efforts of social workers and NGOs demonstrate potential for positive transformation. As they continue to work hand in hand, they contribute significantly to building a more inclusive and equitable world where the rights and benefactions of women are recognized, valued, and celebrated. Eventually, the cooperation between social workers and NGOs is an important force driving women's development toward a future marked by equality, opportunity, and empowerment.

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