

Need for Women Development and Empowerment in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

The paper begins from the understanding women's empowerment. It refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political, and legal strength of the women. To ensure complete right to women and make them confident enough to claim their rights such as safe and comfortable working environment, to make their own choice and decisions, social status in the society, etc. The article highlights cooperative movement for women empowerment in rural India.

Key Words: rural India.

We have been travelling across the country in past few months in Central India Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Bihar with my family to study and evaluate various business opportunities in Agriculture and Agro-Processing sector. During the tour we were surprise and amused looking at how the people are staying in villages especially women's in those states. Even today women's living in those rural villages do not have the basics sanitation facility and our representatives in the parliament both in the center and state government across the party lines talked about the new digital age and the new India.

I have been thinking and trying to analyse the social fabrics in India to understand how the income and wealth basket is divided in the metros, non-metros, rural India and tried to analyse why there is variation in the aspiration of the people in this different baskets is it due to availability of resources, knowledge, passion, support etc., to my surprise we found that there is a wide gap in the thought process of the people in this different cities and its dependent on the opportunities that are available, availability of resources, knowledge as well as the most critical is what is risk in case of a failure. Let me explain it with my own example, I was born in village by the name of Vadali located in Gujarat District Himmatnagar which has a population of approximate 82225 as on the year 2014 and as per the last census. I did my schooling, graduation

from Vadali and now currently doing Ph.D., got married couple of years back and shifted to Mumbai. In this couple of years was able to analyse and experience the big difference in the approach of the people leaving in metro cities and those in rural areas and that difference was comfort zone in other words the risk taking capability and support in case of failure, resources availability, competition etc. People leaving in the metro are in their comfort zone and have plenty of resources at their disposal to fulfil their dreams but in case of people leaving in the rural India or villages they have limited resources, never in there comfort zone but leave a quality life, always aspiring and evaluating new opportunities, creative thinking, and many times they try to solve their problems themselves. I am not critical of people living in the metro cities but sharing the perspective on how an environment influences the thought process of people in day to day life and for the future aspirations.

We are proud today that in last 5 years there have been many women entrepreneurs who have reached the top most position in Indian MNC as well as Foreign MNC across the sectors Indra Nooyi, CEO Pepsico, Bicon - Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, HSBC - Naina Lal Kidwani, Axis Bank- Shikha Sharma, ICICI Bank- Chanda Kochhar, TAFE- Mallika Srinivasan etc. In the same manner there are many Women who have pledge their remaining life in philanthropy and charity like

Sudha Murthy, Rohini Nilkeani wives of the founder of Infosys and are taking lot of initiatives in SHG, Charity and upliftment of people living in rural areas. In addition to that there have been many women who have become successful entrepreneurs like Nina Lekhi promoter of Baggit, Vandana Luthra of VLCC etc.

Mr. Verghese Kurein is one of the greatest champion of the cooperative movement in the world, his work has uplifted millions out of poverty in India and outside in the dairy sector. In the same way in the year 1959 seven Gujarati women leaving in Lohana Niwas, in Girgaum came together to start a venture to create a sustainable livelihood using the only skill they had i.e. cooking. The seven women were Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat, Parvatiben Ramdas Thodani, Ujamben Narandas Kundalia, Banuben. N. Tanna, Laguben Amritlar Gokani, Jayaben V. Vithalani, and one more lady whose name is not known.

The women borrowed from Chaganlal Karamsinh Parekh a small amount who was a member of the Servants of Indian Society and a social worker. They took over a loss-making papad making venture and bought the necessary ingredients and started with a basic infrastructure required to manufacture papads. On 15 March 1959, they gathered on the terrace of their building and started with the production of 4 packets of papads. From the beginning, the women had decided that they would not take any donations, contribution or help, even if the organisation incurred losses. Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, popularly known as Lijjat Papad, is an Indian women's cooperative movement which was involved in manufacturing of fast-moving consumer goods. Currently the annual turnover of the Lijjat Papad is more than Rs. 6.05 billion and provides employment to more than 40,000 people.

Induben was the first women to set up a shop of making kahakhra in Ahmedabad city 35 years ago. In early Sixties, Induben's family suffered financial problems and so she began making four to five snacks at home and later started manufacturing khakhras in the community house for her neighbours and well-wishers. Little did she know

that the venture she started, would one day lead her to become a household name after 10 years of service in the community house, this was in 1961 and by 1970 the shop was doing very well. Her family shifted to the western part of the city at Mithakhali, leaving their home in the old city area. Today, this house serves as the shop selling products made under the banner "**Induben Khakhrawala**". As most Gujarati's are fond of dried snacks, her business grew and within four years she hired four to five assistants to help her meet the increasing demands of the customers.

If you look at the history world over whenever the family have faced the financial challenges and women's of the family have taken the responsibilities of supporting the family by earning income either by doing service or starting its own small business depending upon the best skill sets for the family, in some cases the family has not only survived but also they have gone ahead and created empire. Besides giving example of Lijjat and Induben there are many such inspirational stories and you can also see that on the roads of Mumbai. There are so many stalls on the road where we have seen women serving breakfast, lunch and snacks to office goers in Mumbai and many of them are Maharashtrian ladies, than you have Gujarati women who are making khakhras, dried snacks at home and selling it to various shops as well as to the clients, many of young ladies of my age they have started the profession of making cakes, brownies, party orders etc. All this development is happening in the metro cities but are this opportunities available to rural women the answer is 'No'.

I visited a company they manufacture Sal Oil in the Chhattisgarh area, they have more than 18,000 centres for collection of Sal seeds in forest as well as remote location in Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, the major people who collect the seeds are women. They earn Rs 12 to 14 per kg during the season from June to August and in later months they do handicrafts work or move around the villages for work. When I met some of them, they explained and shared their knowledge on how they survive by managing their households as well as working in the fields or in forest or as a contract labourer, they explained to us how they

utilised the resources available from the forest for making handicrafts or supplying seeds, herbal leaves etc., to food processing units..

India is on a door step where we need another big revolution or co-operative movements for empowerment of women staying in the rural areas. The government initiatives for Make in India is one of the good steps for empowering the Indian industry but the biggest un-mined reserve and growth opportunities is lying is in the empowerment of rural women thru a co-operative movement. The majority of the Handicraft industry is dependent on the products hand made from the rural villages, the cane basket, different shapes of pots etc. We need people to come together and create another movements which would empower the rural women's help them in steady and continuous earning. There have been various initiatives taken by the government on sanitations, toilets for women etc. In the same manner a dedicated and sincere efforts by the

government to uplift the rural women would not only increase the earnings in the rural households but will also help in increase in the consumptions which in turn will boost the GDP of the country. I am keen to pursue on this mission and with help of the family and friends have taken the first step towards it but like me I want all the urban women to take the initiatives for betterment of our sisters in the rural areas which in other form would be a big contribution to mankind.

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Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

~ Helen Keller