



SARWODEEP –A SOURCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THENI DISTRICT

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Abstract

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education is central to the process of sustainable development and is empowering if its contents are geared towards it. Therefore empowering form of education is essential. The major thrust of St.Anne's Congregation Trichy, is to promote social dimension in the educational system. It moulds the hearts and minds of the young girls and women to become socially responsible and intellectually creative to work for their own upliftment. This concept took a tangible expression by doing Extension work in rural areas in and around Periyakulam in Theni District. With the above vision the SARWODEEP (St.Anne's Rural Women Development Education and Empowerment Programme) has emerged from the cradle of Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women, (Autonomous) Periyakulam, an unit of the Sisters of St.Anne, Trichy.

Key Words: - Women, Empowerment, SARWODEEP.

Introduction

Women occupy an important position in a society. The status and empowerment of women are considered as important aspects of social development. This condition varies from country to country, state to state and region to region depending upon their culture, power of adoption of modern changes and education. In India, women produce 30 per cent of food commodities consumed by the country but earn only 10 per cent of income and property or wealth of the country. The Government of India and state authorities alike have increasingly realized the importance of devoting attention to the economic betterment and development of rural women in India. This paper deals with Empowerment of Rural women through SARWODEEP (St.Anne's Rural Women Development Education and Empowerment Programme) in Theni District. This Paper seeks to explore some measures that should be adopted in order to reposition rural women as equal with men in entrepreneurship and Economic development.

Women Empowerment is a comprehensive and much debated issue, and it is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process, which enables women to realize their full uniqueness and powers in all spheres of life. Naturally, the more empowered women become the stronger in confrontation and produce the needs of the society. Women Empowerment is possible only when women become economically self dependent and they participate actively in different decision making processes at home or outside. The Key instruments for supporting women's empowerment are Self-Help Groups.

The Self –Help Groups are generally facilitated by NGOs and increasingly advise and train members in a variety of on and off –farm income generating activities. Indeed, in a number of recent projects, NGOs were substituted by trained facilitators and animators drawn from Self –Help Groups. Through promoting Self Help Group, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) –funded projects have contributed in improving the overall status of women in terms of income, empowerment, welfare and the like. The Self-Help Group approach was not created by IFAD supported operations, but IFAD has contributed to the mainstreaming of this approach in India and to finance programmes for promoting Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu supported by the Women's Development Corporation, an arm of the State Government involved in supporting women's development.

The SARWODEEP, St.Anne's Rural Women Development Education and Empowerment Programme was established by St Anne's sisters, Trichy in the year 1995-1996. It is the social service unit of the Jayaraj Annapackiam College for women, Periyakulam. It adopted ten villages within fifteen kilometres as its target to Empower them through its organs especially Self Help Groups. It used the Mahalir Thittam Project as its tool. However its organs are inter- related in Emancipating and Empowering Rural Women in Theni District. It has liberated the depressed downtrodden women from the shackles of ignorance, illiteracy, injustice and exploitation. In this era of materialism, it strives incessantly to make them self reliant and economically independent. It focuses its attention on combating illiteracy and poverty in rural area. The government agencies like TAHDCO, TRYSEM and DOCWRA have come forward, with subsidy loans to enable them to carry out most of the projects successfully. SARWODEEP focuses its attention on combating illiteracy and poverty in the adopted villages at Endapuzhi, E.Pudukottai, Chemmankuzhi, Erumalainayakanpatti, Melmangalam, T. Kallipatty and Thamaraiikulam. Self employment schemes were also launched there. To make women self supportive, Women groups were formed and awareness programmes were conducted.



Organs of Sarwodeep

1. Self Help groups
2. Community College
3. Sarva Sikhsha Abiyan
4. Life Long Learning
5. Tailoring
6. Type writing
7. Vazhikattum Thittam
8. Day Star
9. Early Intervention Centre and
10. ACCA Press¹

Self Help Groups

In Theni District the women SHGs are formed under Mahalir Thittam Project who are in the age group of 18-60 years. The number of members is fixed between 12 to 20 in one unit. The Mahalir Mandram was formed under SHGs. Women from two Mahalir Manrams got their training in coir making. Mahalir Mandram focuses its attention on Children of earners, who can ill afford and education, upto five years. Literacy programmes are a regular feature.²

It promotes the status of Women through various welfare programmes of women and children in the adjoining village, 15 Mahalir Mandrams are formed which enjoy an amount of Rs.1,25,000 as financial assistance from the Government of Tamilnadu. 12 Mazhazhayar Manrams are founded to take care of the children between the age group of 3 to 5 of the daily wage earners. The SHGs undergo periodical vocational training programmes for successful execution of the task assigned. The animators and the teachers of Mazhazhayar Manrams have been offered one week training programmes to educate the children properly. The habit of saving is motivated and inculcated among the women folk by the members of Self Help Groups.

After availing loans from the Bank, SHG women have started doing business and have become committed to the responsible status of life. They have taken their products with the support of Mahalir Thittam to the Exhibitions conducted at New Delhi, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Chennai, Madurai, Theni and Periyakulam.

During 2006-2007, 1700 SHG members are the beneficiaries of Mahalir Thittam through various training programmes like

1. Entrepreneur Development programme,
2. Computer applications,
3. Book Binding,
4. Mushroom culture,
5. Vermi compost,
6. Sanitary napkins,
7. Juice preparations and
8. Embroidery.

In 2007-2008, The SHGs have risen to 117 in number with 1600 members. Impressed by their enthusiasm and steady growth, the government offered Skill Training with the incentive of Rs.3,12,420. The Director of SARWODEEP, as a mentor of SHGs, adopted necessary measures to enable them to avail loans from various Banks like IOB, Canara Bank, Co-Operative Bank and THADCO. The training and the guidance offered to the SHG members instill confidence in them and sensitize them to the social, economical, cultural and political issues.

Twelve Pre School centres, with 357 children function under SARWODEEP at the hamlets in and around Periyakulam. Nearly 200 children who had been trained in the pre School centres, were admitted in Primary Schools. The parents of the children have formed Self Help Groups. Income generating skills are imparted to the members. Personality Development Programmes are offered to enable them to participate in the welfare activities of the villages.³

SARWODEEP has been conducting awareness programmes about AIDS. Self – Help Group members are the main focus of it in all such activities. A sum of Rs.2, 24,25,000/ has been granted as loan for the SHG members. One hundred members

¹ Monthly Report of SARWODEEP, May 2012,p.13.

² Project Report of Mahalir Thittam, Collectorate,Theni,p.3.

³ Ibid,p.4.



have attended a three month training programme on Beautician and Printing Technology. It has reached its target of forming 45 New Self Help Groups besides the existing 150 SHGs with its focus on providing means of livelihood for the rural women in Theni District. Healthy Sanitary Napkin unit is an innovative venture undertaken by SARWODEEP for promoting the Health and status of the rural women in Theni District.

SARWODEEP reached its target of forming 70 new SHGs during the year 2012-2013. The products prepared by the Self Help Groups were kept for sale in Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women, Periyakulam, Hajee Karutha Rowther Howdia College, Uthamapalayam, Theni Nadar Saraswathy College, Vadapudupatty, and Kammavar College, Koduvilarpatty, Theni.⁴ Now there are 216 Self Help Groups consisting of 2617 members under SARWODEEP has been linked with TNSRLM – Tamilnadu State Rural Livelihood Mission.

Community College

The Community College was established on 28th July 1999, with the aim to give education to the downtrodden and backward people in Theni District. It is affiliated to NIOS/TNOU this provides career oriented courses to the rural women especially school dropouts and married women, to make them employable and procure them easy access to jobs. It used different educational methods to give employment training. It was started on the model of European and American Community Colleges. Education is given on the basis of employment opportunities adopted to this area. The Courses taught in the Community College are,

1. Computer Software
2. Nursing Assistant
3. Pre School Teachers
4. Tailoring, Embroidering and Dress making
5. Textile Technology
6. Office Management
7. Beautician and Skin care
8. The Training methods adopted in the Community College are
9. Life skill Development
10. Employment skill Development
11. Field Training in Industries
12. Self employment training⁵

Sarva Sikhsa Abiyan - Inclusive Education Of Disabled

This District level Inclusive Education Programme was started by SARWODEEP in the year 2012. It has run this programme successfully for one year.

Life Long Learning

It is a training programme for the Self Help Group members organised by SARWODEEP. Some of the members have attended the lifelong learning programme, organized by Vidiyal, Bodi a N.G.O. Their participation in awareness programmes, managing their small trades and maintenance of accounts have endowed them with managerial skills and instilled confidence in them to take decision and voice out their opinions. Women are no longer the secondary citizens but uplifted to the foremost rung in the hierarchical structure of the society. The loans procured from the banks enhanced them to the status of entrepreneurs.⁶

Tailoring

The SARWODEEP plays a vital role in the uplift of the disadvantaged women of the adjacent villages of Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women, Periyakulam. It is keen on channelizing the productive efforts of these women to their own advantage. More than 250 women and girls have underwent an intensive training programme in sewing. Sewing Machines were distributed to the trainees. Most of the students were benefited from St. Anne's Tailoring Institute. Among them many were dropouts, widows and destitute.

Typewriting Typewriting course was started on 26th June 1998. It aimed to train the Economically backward students in the

⁴ Monthly Report of SARWODEEP, September, 2014, p.15.

⁵ Monthly Report of St. Anne's Community College, July, 1999, p.3.

⁶ Daily Diary of SARWODEEP on 25-5-2012.



Jayaraj Annapackiam College, in technical education for employment purpose. Every year it has given free training to 15 students.

Examinations were conducted twice a year. Many of the students have got Distinction and some students have got I class in the Typewriting Examination through St.Anne's Typewriting Institute.⁷

Vazhikattum Thittam for Differently Abled

The SARWODEEP was selected to Coordinate Valikattum Thittam for the differently abled people in Periyakulam block, by the District Rehabilitation development office, Theni in the year 2010-2011.

Day Star

The Day Star centre for the mentally challenged children (above 6 years) was started on 3-12-2003 by SARWODEEP to promote self help and make them acceptable to their parents and neighbours. The children from 6 to 10 years were collected by SARWODEEP vehicle in and around Periyakulam. The strength of the children varied from time to time.⁸

Early Intervention Centre

The Government of Tamilnadu, Department of Rehabilitation, Chennai have approved for the establishment of two Early Intervention Centre for Mentally Retarded Children in Theni District with 25 children in each of them with 5 staff members to care of, to train the children. One among them was maintained by SARWODEEP.⁹

ACCA-Press

Anne,s Communication and Cultural Academy -ACCA Press was started for the welfare of the Rural, Downtrodden, dropout, Divorced Women and Widows. It was started in 11-7-2001. Most of the workers were Differently abled persons. Now it also acted as the Vocational Training Centre for Self Help Group members. It was started with 6 workers in the beginning today 13 workers are working in the ACCA Press among them six are Differently able persons. Four Mentally Retarded Persons undergo training in Binding and Lamination Work. The Co-ordinators, instructors and student volunteers took a survey of widows, destitute, teen-aged mothers and the handicapped at Thamaraiikulam. Women who cannot afford to pursue their higher studies are employed in the binding and lamination Centre opened by SARWODEEP. Printing and Binding section was started by SARWODEEP on 1-1-2003 and furnished with advanced machines to offer job opportunities to destitute women.¹⁰

Conclusion

Now a day's economic development is one of the factors that has changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship programme with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining status in family and community. The women were empowering themselves technically to cope with the changing times and productively using their free time and existing skills for developing themselves and the society. They were engaged in starting individual or collective income generation programme with the help of Self Help Groups. This will not only generate income for them but also improve the decision making capabilities that led to overall empowerment. In the selected area the impact of SARWODEEP on Rural Women is significant. After joining in these drastic changes are seen in the life style of women. It acted as a liberating force cutting across the barriers of inequality and discrimination. It is functioning with 2617 members of 216 SHGs. The Skill training offered by SARWODEEP has become a source to generate income that has banished their poverty. Now they have started earning money, becoming independent and self motivated. They can take their own decisions and also give their suggestions to their family members. The study found significant difference in literacy level and Awareness level of Women by the effort of SARWODEEP. It has effected a silent revolution in the society through its organs, for the empowerment of rural women.

⁷ Annual Report of St.Anne's Typewriting Institute,1998,p.2.

⁸ Monthly Report of the SARWODEEP, December.2003,p.34.

⁹ Ibid,p.36.

¹⁰ Monthly Report of ACCA-Press, July 2001,p.3.