



DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS

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I. Significance of Women Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is considered as one of the most important factors contributing to the industrial growth and thereby to the economic development of a country. Though entrepreneurship is a male-dominated from times immemorial, it is a recent origin among women in India.

A, woman entrepreneur is an adult who owns and runs an enterprise, especially a commercial one, often at personal financial risk. Entrepreneurship enhances financial independence and self-esteem of women.

In a country like India, the earnings of the head or male member of the family in rural areas are generally inadequate to sustain the needs of the family. Added to this it is found in major parts of rural India, that the male member is addicted to various vices such as alcohol drinking, gambling etc. Under these circumstances, the meager earnings of the male member are hardly sufficient to provide hygienic food and better education to the children. As such there is an imperative need on the earnings of the female members by undertaking income generating self-employment activities. Besides an earning women enjoys self respect in the society as she can survive on her own legs in times of distress.

It is true that if a house-wife becomes an earning member she can mould the family in a progressive manner, give proper education to children and guide the husband in a smooth and pleasant way and also can take independent decisions for better prosperity.. Not only that she can also establish a fame and exemplary character in the society and lit up the lazy souls with her strenuous efforts. Towards this end, the Government of India has introduced Self-Help Groups with the assistance of UNICEF. By 2001 there are as many as 4,75,646, Self-Help Groups in Andhra Pradesh alone with a membership of 65.40 lakh women with a total corpus fund of Rs.1624.95 crores (The Hindu, Dated 8-3-2004 p-6).

II .Challenges & Obstacles

Even through female entrepreneurship and the formation of women business networks is steadily rising, there are a number of challenges and obstacles that female entrepreneurs . Majority of these women come from the lowest strata the caste/class hierarchy. Their caste affiliation restricts their mobility, their class membership limits their access to productive, resources while their gender role minimizes their economic participation, it being limited to only extensions of domestic orders. As such they are marginalized as workers are found in situations of immense exploitation and victimization and are therefore, forced to a status of invisibility and powerlessness.

Women are always subordinated to men in this country on account of the age-old traditions of religious and cultural constraints. Their lower literacy rate is the main cause and effect of their subordinate position in the society. Majority of the women perform domestic as well as household duties which are never paid. They cannot alleviate the burden of responsibilities like child bearing which is their lot by nature.

Though equal status of women in the non-traditional sectors of the economy is allowed by Constitution of India, and the laws have been made to prevent male domination over women in the economic, social, and political fields, the cultural setting has still restricted women in India to their traditional role. Therefore, the task of integrating women in the national development requires simultaneous efforts to improve their working conditions from both economic and social angles. Broadly womens' participation in economic development calls for arrangements that would lighten their domestic workload and release them for other economic and a socially productive work. For this women need to search more avenues for self-employment. The development of women



entrepreneurship can make a significant contribution in this respect.. In short, the following are the major challenges that they have to face in the wake of male-dominated business sphere.

Choice between family and career

- 1) Illiteracy or low level of education
- 2) Dearth of financial assistance
- 3) Socio-cultural barriers. Inhaling gender discrimination

III. Case Studies

The following two real success stories which are collected and prepared in 2006 by the authors reveal how women have benefited a lot in the midst of distress by becoming a member in SHG.

Case study - 1

Smt. Sambangi Nagamani from Patakottagudem of Kottagudem Mandal, Khammam District, Andhra Pradesh, hailed from a very poor family. She is thirty-three years old with a minimum academic qualification of 8th class. Her life partner is professionally a tailor, earning Rs.600/- per month, which is insufficient even to provide a square meal to their three wards—one son and two daughters. Day by day they sink to serve the minimum basic needs of their children. They proved a failure in discharging their parental duties and responsibilities like providing food and education.

Owing to this, now and then they had to take loans from the wolfish moneylenders who devours and gobble up their domestic existence. They were exploited and were helpless in repaying the debts as they were saturated at Rs.5,300/- There was no help during this crisis period. None treads the heels of these penurious destitute to pamper them in their midlife crisis.

By the timely advice of her husband, she sold away some gold ornaments for Rs.3000/- with which she purchased one grinder for grinding pulses, spices, cereals and other food ingredients and started earning Rs.400/- per month but it was a speck of dust even to pay the interest not to speak of liquidation of previous debts. Consequently it became the last gasp of crisis even to pay the school fee for their children causing them inevitably to drop out. Because of heavy competition, their income was reduced from omega to alpha. Such misshapeness caused disgust and dispassionate among the parents especially about the future of their daughters. Subsequently her health too deteriorated, dragging them to the cobweb of debts.

At this appallingly deplorable and critical condition, there dawned an eastern beacon of light by DRDA and Velugu project team about the different schemes for the SHG massive programme. They disclosed the process and policies in the Patakottagudem village conference how they would unflinchingly help the distressed women with lower income groups. Mrs.S.Nagamani patiently listened to this benevolent programme. She discussed the scheme of SHG with the neighbours and the members of Prasanthi Mahila Group run with the help of Grama Deepika. She too joined as a member and started her visions of futurity in 1999 in the thrift movement with a subscription of Rs.30/- per month. She borrowed an amount of Rs.1500/- and Rs.3000/- in two stages as an internal loan from the SHG. She invested half of the loan amount towards liquidating her previous debts and the remaining for the domestic expenses. After being boosted up her unflinching faith and staunch belief and confidence in SHG scheme, she used to pay regular thrift and loan installment and become a stronghold. Thus she blessed with and bestowed on a boon in tidal waves and flood of poverty.

Our protagonist, Smt.S.Nagamani envisaged visionary idea, a lightening flash in her dark cloudy life, of starting a new enterprise by starting new garments product business, a demand oriented market. She approached the then DRDA APO and visibly explained to him about her future plans. Immediately he consented and suggested that she could avail raw material at low cost at Vijzyawada and Hyderabad where garment business is the cynosure.



She welcomed his precious advice and with flying colours completed training in textile designing, piece cutting, learning novel types of models, stitching skills etc in TTDC Khamma. She was granted an amount of Rs.15000/- bank linkage loan in the year 2000. She purchased three sewing machines and from the remaining amount and adding her own capital of Rs.2000/-she bought for colours of cloth on wholesale in Vijayawada. Besides this, she also purchased stickers, colour twins, different types of buttons, cloth in flowers, colour treads etc in Hyderabad. Thus she procured complete raw materials for her product. She recruited two trained women tailors and gave training on the techniques and skills garment making.

Later, as another progressive stride, she ventured some parallel garment making such as nighties, petticoats and children garments. She fruitfully marketed them in local colonies and excluding all expenditure. This venturesome victory pulled her from the brink of disastrous collapse and filled in her the core confidence to the brim and led her to the expansion of her business right from wholesale markets to the footpath vendors on cash and credit for which the DRDA benignly smiled on her by sanctioning further amount of Rs.50,000/- to her for meeting the ample orders received from the cross-section of business people. Her capital investment is commitment and conviction, her enthusiastic zeal, industrious soul and spirit. She purchased three more sewing machines and raw materials and recruited two more tailors to earmark herself up to the crest of exposure.

She supplied her products to the local DWCR Bazaar, Exhibitions, Melas and Pushkaras. She also, with dogged determination, spiritedly participated with her products in other State exhibitions such as Madhya Pradesh and Orissa etc, organized by the Ministry of Rural Development and participated in collaboration with DRDA and by proving her mettle from the futile to fertile and from the crescent state of life to the full moon. She was honoured with "The Best Participant Award" which boosted up her reputation and boomed her sales in the garment business. Thus Smt.Nagamani emerged from dust to crest, from a shes to flying ace like phoenix.

She championed herself in understanding the varied target of the public on her business especially on fashion design. Because of the consumption of dresses with latest fashion, irritable competition on prices in the market, on the advice of the local DRDA, on the skills of technology, she could supply quality garments at low cost to the consumers as per their targets a deal benefit for consumer and her income as well. She was fully acquainted with latest innovation and TTDC training. Thus she could expand the realms of her business to the interstates and the profit increased from Rs.2000/- to Rs.5500/- per month. Besides this she earned complete exemption for sales tax on her garments business through DRDA. Now she cleared all the private loans and group loans except an amount of Rs.24,800/- bank debt apart from her present own assets such as six sewing machines worth Rs.3500/- each, one bicycle, two and half tulas gold ornaments and one colour Television. She could provide some livelihood to five more women of her locality who are below poverty line.

But all the days are not springy and spongy but thorny too tread on. To best two with laured wreath she had to mount various challenges flooded from different quarters like male dominance, lack of freedom in the business, cutthroat competition in the field, craze of public in mill made products lack of packing technology, lack of commercial publicity for the products and lack of capital investment. Even then she did not budge an inch with utter difference but fullest confidence and fortitude. She surmounted all these critical hurdles and barricades by investing her profits in a planned way i.e. repayment of loans, group savings on time, on children's education, on business reinvestment by avoiding lavish expenditure. Sometimes she was cleft in stick between a housewife and head of enterprise. But by her resourceful wit and wisdom, she planned herself at the apex of her career. She did not leave her family suffer for. For the marriages of her children she took a LIC policy for Rs. 1,00,000/- and Recurring deposit of Rs. 50,000/- and had been regularly paying the installment. She remodeled her old house to RCC under AP Government Housing Scheme and got gas under Deepam Programme. She was ambidextrous in dealing with her regular proceedings and in discharging her social responsibilities and citizenal duties like HIV Aids Awareness Programme, Eradication of Child Labour and Illiteracy, Clean and Green, and Dropout Avoiding Camps. She is an exemplary role model to other women in the society for social service.



The domestic deity in her stirs for giving qualitative education to her children. Her eldest daughter is now studying II BA in Government Degree College, Kottagudem, her second daughter is studying Intermediate in a private junior college and her only son is studying class VIII in a local private school. Her sole life ambition is to give good and proper education to her children so as to see them in higher position of life. Now, she recollects how her river of life meandered on rocky stones and how it fell from dizzy heights un heights unhesitatingly and how, after joining the SHG, her life flowed peacefully and calmly. Now she is very ardent and confident, bold and venturesome to lead and to develop leadership qualities, communication skills, and technologies upgrading initiation within her. Finally she extended her thanks to the APO who helped a lot in making her join SHG through Velugu and at last she thanked the Government of Andhra Pradesh who worked for the empowerment of Rural Women through DRDA and their permissive performance.

Case Study – 2

Pedda sreeramuram is a remote village, in Kanchali mandal of Srikakulam District. There is one poor family consisting of four members in the village. The head of the family is Smt Renuka Prabhavati, aged 32 years. She is very industrious and diligent lady. The entire family is wriggling in the pool of poverty. She has great zeal and enthusiasm to come out of poverty. She and her husband worked in agricultural field to eke out their livelihood. They used to get Rs.50 to Rs.60 as wages per day. They had two children one male and one female in a small hut. It is a very difficult thing to come out of hardships with this meager amount of income. Besides this, the income is only seasonal. She miserably failed to provide the primary needs of food, shelter and clothing. She was unable to provide good education to her children. Their life is very pathetic and miserable. In these tragic conditions, her husband became sick and bed-ridden and unable to work anywhere. After sudden ailment of her husband she not only faced problems related to finance but also was ill-treated by her in-laws and relatives

She used to collect dry leaves of coconut as fire wood and used to cook the food for members of the family. Seldom she used to go for labour work and received Rs.25 per day. This money is not sufficient for her to afford the family needs. Hence sometimes, she borrowed money from moneylenders. Paying the interest to the moneylenders itself takes a toll, leaving little, if at all anything to repay the principal amount. At the hands of moneylenders, she was often caught in a debt trap, for which she felt agony.

Under these circumstances, one day she approached the gram sarpunch for an amicable salvation. The sarpunch, who was kind and generous man, advised her to join in SHG. He explained the advantages of SHG vividly and gave her a helping hand to join SHG. But this illiterate and ignorant woman could not understand the concept of SHG named “Sri Venkateswara Mahila Self Help Group” in 1998. She emphasized the significance of savings and its good returns. This encouragement brought her to this stage today. To her bewilderment as on date of enquiry her balance of saving is Rs.600/-, Rs.800/- and Rs.1500/- respectively to meet the medical expenses towards her husband and sundry domestic needs.

With this bright light of help and enlightenment she discussed with her husband for their economic betterment. Her husband advised her to take an acre of land with coconut plantation on lease for 5 years from local landlord to start coconut business at national highway nearer to their village. She approached the bank through the SHG for bank linkage loan and received Rs.20,000, from loan sanctioned for the Group which amount to Rs. 75,000/- In addition to this added her own funds to the tune of Rs.3000, she acquired 1.5 acres of coconut plantation for five years on lease. She adopted better strategies for the conservation of the land and she took the advice of the nearest Horticulture personnel for appropriate use of fertilizers, water management and achieved tremendous result by which she gained high yield of coconuts. She earned nearly more than Rs.1000 per month as profit and met the home needs and paid the loan installments regularly. The initiative of selling coconuts on highway has been encouraging her entrepreneurship and increased enthusiasm.



Further, she procured coconuts from her surrounding coconut farmers; in turn she sold them on retail and wholesale, who used to purchase the cocoanuts with mini vans and autos for their livelihood. The footpath vendors and mobile vendors used to come to her village from urban areas to buy a bulk of her coconuts and sell them in their places at a high price. She maintained rapport and good relations with her customers by selling her quality coconuts at a reasonable price. She has been selling the coconuts both in cash and on credit basis. She gave discount to the buyers, who purchased bulk of coconuts in one time. She has been recovering overdues amicably within a span of limited period. During the period of summer season has sales of cocoanuts had abnormally increased and she was unable to meet the full demand. She meticulously planned the things for better expectations. She abundantly increased her yielding, which led her to a better financial position. By all her means her monthly income has raised up to Rs.3500/- per month and during the summer season it reached to Rs.4500/-

Besides her strenuous endeavors she faced many problems regarding viral diseases and famine conditions. She received good encouragement for Training and Technology Development Centre (T.T.D.C). She approached the APO, DRDA to get second linkage in 2002 and managed humbly, got sanctioned a loan to the Group amounted to Rs.85,000/- under SGSY and she got her share of loan amount of Rs.25,000/- In addition to this amount she added Rs.5000/- from her loan savings and own funds, purchased 1.5 acre of land at the rate of Rs.27,000/- in the village and rest of the amount was used to dig well for drainage purpose. The land is being fertile and abundant in ground water. Then she became a small farmer and was found of immense praise and satisfaction. She planted coconut plants, used to follow innovative agri-measures time to time. Unfortunately her husband fell ill and unable to support her in the coconut plantation. Hence she recruited one local person on payment of Rs.500/- per month to help her in business and for cultivating growing coconut plantation. Decision-making is an important quality for her to reach the leaps of the ladder. She was very regular in clearing debts to the bank and became an embodiment of service to the other women in the Group.

Fortunately, the education department in her village in 2002 opened the mid-day meal programme for school children. As a woman of good reputation the Mandal Education Officer had chosen her as the caretaker for this programme. He recommended her name for the sanction of Rs.10,000/- under Community Investment Fund to the DRDA. Then she was sanctioned the same amount and purchased utensils, food grains, plates, one hearth for preparing food for school children, and she successfully ran the mid day meal programme. She was very satisfied with this noble job and received an amount of Rs.600/- per month as an honorarium. She was sanctioned a house under A.P.Housing Scheme and added borrowed money of Rs. 15,000/- from moneylenders and constructed one RCC building in the place of her own hut and became owner of a comfortable house. She also got one gas connection under Deepam Scheme and had wiped out her tears.

Today, she is financially independent and arranged basic services to the community with the help of her SHG. The economic independence, in turn, led to a change in the intra-household dynamics as her in-laws and relatives later respected her. The person who always wriggling in the pool of poverty came out as a successful woman entrepreneur after she became in SHG. The SHG is a key, which unlocks the hidden treasures of happy, and asset creation. She can easily afford her children to get good education. She says that the simple living and high thinking should be the motto of her life. She fulfilled her desires with great zeal. Her ambition is that her children should become good citizens and to settle in high level of economic position. With the moral support of DRDA and SHG she reached the great laurels of her life. Finally she says that the intervention of Velugu project increased in her self-esteem and self-confidence.

IV. Conclusion

The foregoing two case examples clearly reveal that by becoming member in a SHG and by starting an income generating activity, there appears a major metamorphosis in the economic and living conditions the women who happened to be the members of the families living below the poverty-line.