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AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH INDIA WITH SELECTED INDICATORS

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to examine the status of women empowerment in South India with selected direct and indirect indicators. National Family Health Survey round 3 data of 2005-06 was used for the analysis. Major indicators addressed in this paper are employment, education, ownership of wealth under indirect indicators and decision making and access and control over income as direct indicators. The study reveals that all the four South Indian States need to do a lot more to achieve the goal of women empowerment (autonomy).

Keywords: Empowerment, Autonomy, Decision Making, Employment

1. Introduction

The concept of Women Empowerment has become the focal point of numerous studies in demographic literature. Majority of the studies almost agree that women occupy a lower status, socially and economically, both in the household and society. Women have a smaller range of opportunities than men within the diversifying labour market. They are found largely in the informal sector where the pay is low and unsteady and social security is not available (Boserup, 1970). Empowerment of women and their role in the development process have emerged as one of the focal points of debate in recent times.

It is an accepted fact that any economic and social development could be meaningful only when women are in the main stream of progress. Empowerment is essential for a woman to succeed and survive in a dynamic society. Greater interventions by Governments and international bodies have contributed to increasing level of female participation in economic activities all over the world.

Researchers have identified many tools for Women Empowerment. In the present discussion, the Researcher considered only some

selected variables of Empowerment viz;

- Employment
- Education
- Ownership of Wealth
- Decision Making and
- Access and Control over Income

All these indicators are proved to be the determinants of Women Empowerment in many studies.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The broad and basic objective of this paper was to identify the status of Women Empowerment in South India with the help of direct and indirect indicators.

2.2 Data Source and Methodology

The data used for the analysis in this study were from National Family and Health Survey round 3 (NFHS 3) of 2005-06 which was coordinated by the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai. The NFHS is one of a series of fairly comparable Demographic Health Surveys (DHS), available for about seventy low and middle income

countries. Following strict parameters of questioning, married women aged between 15 and 49 were interviewed for this survey.

Methodology used in this study was descriptive analysis and the Wealth Index was constructed to assess the economic status of women. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was also used.

2.3 The Settings/Profile of the Study Area

The field of investigation for the study was South Indian States. South India is a socio-political region of India that comprises of four Indian States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry, whose inhabitants are collectively referred to as South Indians. This region includes the entire Indian Peninsula lying south of the Vindhya Ranges. The Narmada and Mahanadi rivers form the northern boundaries of the region, while the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal surround the Peninsula in the west, south and east respectively .

The present study exempted the Union Territory of Puducherry under the profile of study area. Though it falls within the boundary of South India, there were problems related to data available.

3. Analysis and Interpretation

The Empowerment Indicators used in this paper are divided into two categories- direct and indirect. Direct Indicators of Women Empowerment such as decision-making, mobility and access and control over income can be viewed both as an outcome and a process. Indirect Indicators like education, employment and ownership of wealth show a stronger association with Direct Indicators of Autonomy. Researchers are of the opinion that education of women automatically leads to empowerment. The following discussion explains the impact of each of these indicators

in South India, with the help of NFHS 3 data.

3.1 Employment

Employment, the Indirect Indicator of Empowerment, can be considered as a shield for women to escape from all social evils. Thus female employment and their role in the development process have emerged as one of the focal points of debate in many studies. Traditionally, a woman's place has been at home and a generation ago, her employment outside home was looked down upon by the society. Now this situation has changed. Women have started seeking employment outside their homes through economic necessity, followed by the desire to raise the economic status of their homes, to have an independent income, to make use of education, to pursue a career etc (Sivakami 1997).

The participation of women in economic activities, particularly outside home, is often posited as an important Enabling Factor in the Economic and Social Empowerment of Women. Not only can employment be a source of economic independence but also it can help to give women a sense of self-worth (Sunitha Kishor, Kamala Gupta, 2004).

Table- 1 depicts the employment status of women in South India. All four South Indian States, except Kerala, show that statistics of currently employed women are above the Indian Average. Kerala records the lowest number, with 27.9 %. But in terms of percentage earnings in cash from employment, Kerala ranks first with a percentage of 91.3 and Karnataka is in the last position with 72%.

3.2 Education

Education has long been recognized as a crucial factor which influenced Women Empowerment. An extensive demographic literature has been devoted to examining the role of female education in promoting autonomy. The evidence accumulated provides

a compelling rationale for advocating increased investment in education and the elimination of institutional and cultural barriers to women's access to schooling.

Table- 2 explains the educational attainment and literacy of women in South India. Kerala stands first against these two indicators. The literacy among women in Kerala is 93% which is far ahead of other three states. Sixty two percentage of women in Kerala completed Secondary Education and 25.7% completed Higher Education. Andhra Pradesh, with 37.8%, is the lowest in Secondary Education of women and only 8.8% completed Higher Education. The literacy rate of Tamil Nadu is 69.4%, which is second highest among South Indian States. Literacy rate of Andhra Pradesh is 49.6% which is lower than the Indian Average.

3.3 Ownership of Wealth

In order to assess the economic status of women, the Researcher has used Household Wealth as an indicator of economic status. The Wealth Index is an attempt to make better use of existing data in the Demography and Health Surveys in a systematic fashion to determine a household's relative economic status (Shea Oscar Rutstein, Kiersten Johnson 2004). Each household asset is assigned a weight (factor score), generated through Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The resulting asset scores are standardized in relation to a normal distribution with mean zero and standard deviation of one. The sum of scores of these assets possessed by each household resulted in that Household's Wealth Index Factor or Score. The sample was then divided into *population quintiles*, with each quintile given a rank from one (poorest) to five (wealthiest). These quintiles are based on the distribution of the *de jure* household population.

The Housing Characteristics of Households in **Table-3** provide an understanding of living

condition of women in South India. It covers information on Housing Characteristics like electricity, water sources, toilet facility, cooking fuel and types of living houses. All these indicators together constitute the Wealth Index. Kerala recorded greater access to electricity, toilet facilities and living house condition. The toilet facility of Kerala, covering 96.1% of the population, was a notable achievement compared to other three states. Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were ranked the lowest in terms of toilet facility and it was below the Indian Average.

Ninety four percentage of respondents in Andhra Pradesh have access to improved sources of drinking water, next to Tamil Nadu with 93.5%. Improved sources of drinking water include water piped into the dwelling, yard or plot, water available from a public tap or standpipe, a tube well or borehole, a protected dug well, a protected spring and rain water. Only 69.1% of respondents in Kerala have access to improved drinking water sources.

There is no notable difference in the statistics of electricity coverage among South Indian States. Kerala with 91% recorded the highest and Andhra Pradesh with 88.4% was the lowest in this regard.

Smoke from solid cooking fuel is a serious health hazard. Solid cooking fuels include coal/lignite, wood, straw, shrubs, grass, agricultural crop waste and cow dung. To study the potential for exposure to cooking smoke from solid fuel, NFHS 3 collected information on the type of fuel used for cooking. **Table- 3** shows that 71.4% of respondents in Kerala are exposed to smoke from cooking fuel. This is found to be the major cause of the increasing number of asthma patients among women in Kerala. As far as fuel using is concerned, Tamil Nadu is in a better position with only 60.5% being exposed to solid fuel compared to other states.

In terms of living house condition, NFHS 3 considered many aspects.

Table- 3 shows the percentage of population living in a *pucca house*¹. In Kerala, 85.1% of respondents live in safe housing conditions. Only 55.1% of respondents in Karnataka live in a pucca house and that is the lowest among South Indian States.

The mean number of persons per room used for sleeping is an indicator that assesses the level of crowding in a house. The number of persons per sleeping room lies in the range of 2.2 to 3.4 in South Indian States. In Kerala, the average number of persons sleeping in a room is 2.2, which is the lowest among South Indian States. Karnataka with 3.4 persons per room is the highest and it is above the Indian Average.

Table- 4 shows the wealth quintiles of South Indian States. The Wealth Index was used to assess the economic status of households. It is an indicator of the level of wealth that is consistent with expenditure and income measures (Rutstein, 1999). The Wealth Index was constructed by using household asset data and housing characteristics².

Table -4 presents the population of South Indian States, segmented into wealth quintiles. In Kerala, 44.8% of respondents are found in the highest wealth quintiles and only 1% are located in the lowest quintile. The percentage of respondents from other quintiles are almost equal with a narrow range between 10.6% and 10.8%. In Andhra Pradesh, only 17.1% of respondents live under the highest wealth quintiles, next to Tamil Nadu with 19.5% and Karnataka with 19.8%.

3.4 Participation in Decision Making

This section is devoted to explaining the decision making power of women, a direct determinant of empowerment, in South India. NFHS 3 asked many questions to extract the decision making power of respondents and

collected information from respondents on their participation in four different types of decisions.

- Their own health care,
- Making large household purchase,
- Making household purchase for daily needs,
- Visit to family or relatives.

Decisions about large purchases and purchases for daily needs were meant to tap into the economic decision making process in the household. Economic Independence is an important indicator of female autonomy in the demographic literature. The assumption is that it leads to a greater control by women over how resources are allocated and hence a greater control over their own lives.

Table- 5 gives the statistics on different decision making indicators. About the decision making on their own health, 75.3% of women take decision alone or jointly with their husbands in Kerala, followed by Tamil Nadu with 73.2%. Only 53.3% of women in Karnataka participate in the decision making about their health care. On making decision about major household purchases, Tamil Nadu occupies the first place with 63.3%. Another major information on the freedom of movement is permission for visiting her family. In this statistics, 78.4% of women in Kerala and 76.7% in Tamil Nadu take this decision by themselves or with their husbands. Statistics on decision about all these four indicators together show that all South Indian States, except Karnataka, are above the Indian Average.

3.5 Access and Control over Income

To understand women's access to financial resources, NFHS 3 asked all respondents whether they have any money of their own that they alone can decide how to use and whether they have a bank or savings account that they themselves use. **Table- 6** depicts women's access to money and their knowledge of micro credit programmes. In

Karnataka, 60.3% of women have money and they can decide on how to use it. In Kerala, only 20.7% of women have access and that is the lowest among South Indian States. But in the case of bank account, 27% of women in Kerala have bank account. Another question on access to finance is about knowledge on micro-credit programmes and percentage of women who have taken loan from these programmes. In Kerala, 82.6% of respondents are aware of these programmes but only 8% have availed loan from this source.

For women, earning cash is not likely to be a sufficient condition for Financial Empowerment. Financial Empowerment also requires control over the use of one's earnings. **Table- 7** furnishes details about this particular indicator. Kerala and Tamil Nadu record a significant lead over other states. In Kerala, 89.7% of women decide on how to spend their earnings jointly with their husband or alone, followed by Tamil Nadu with 87.5%. Andhra Pradesh occupies the lowest position in this regard. Only 68.8% of women have the freedom to decide on how to spend their earnings.

4. Conclusion

Major Direct and Indirect Indicators of Empowerment were assessed in this discussion. Empowerment tools like Employment, Education, Possession of Wealth and Power of Decision Making were considered for the analysis. The employment status of women in all South Indian States are not satisfactory. On an average, nearly 50% of women are unemployed in South India. Strangely, Andhra Pradesh performed well in the case of employment status of women compared to other South Indian States. Nearly 52% of women in Andhra Pradesh are engaged in some sort of economic activities. At the same time, out of the employed, only 83.6% of women earn cash out of their

employment in Andhra Pradesh. Among the employed women in Kerala, 91.3% earn cash out of their employment.

Being a tool of Women Empowerment, women education has received considerable attention on the part of policy makers. Educational status of women in South India shows a dismal picture with the exception of Kerala. In Kerala, 93% of women are literate. In Andhra Pradesh, it is only 49.6%, which is below the Indian Average. This poor performance in education demands greater attention.

The economic status of women in South India was assessed by using Asset Ownership Index. The distribution of households based on wealth quintiles are almost similar in South India except Kerala. In Kerala, 44.8% of households belong to the highest wealth quintiles. Other South Indian States coming under the highest wealth quintiles constitute only less than 20%.

Women's decision making power was also examined in the present investigation. Decision making power of women and control over their income are considered as a powerful tool of Women Empowerment. As far as decision making power of women is concerned, Tamil Nadu stood first with 91.8% of women participating in the decision making process along with their husbands. In Karnataka, 26.9% of women did not participate in any one of the stated decisions.

Women's access and control over income was also examined to assess the socio economic status of women. In Karnataka, 60.3% of women have their own money and that they themselves can decide on how to use. But in Kerala, only 20.7% of women have this power. The study shows that all the South Indian States should pay special attention to all these Direct and Indirect Indicators of Women Empowerment to meet the desired goal.

5. Scope for Further Research

The Researcher recommends the following research questions for further research.

- § The relative role of Direct and Indirect Indicators on Women Empowerment.
- § Are Indirect Indicators really contributing to the autonomy of women?
- § Mother's workforce participation and its impact on the survival of their children

Specific References

1. Houses made with high quality materials throughout, including the floor, roof and exterior walls, are called pucca house.
2. NFHS 3 Wealth Index is based on the following 33 assets and housing characteristics: household electrification, type of windows, drinking water sources, type of toilet facility ,type of flooring, material of exterior walls, type of roofing, cooking fuel, house ownership, number of members per sleeping room, ownership of a bank or post office account, mattress, a pressure cooker ,a chair, a cot/bed, a table, an electric fan, a radio/transistor, a black and white TV, a colour TV, a sewing machine, a mobile phone, any other telephone, a computer, a refrigerator ,a watch or clock ,a bicycle, a motor cycle/ scooter, an animal drawn cart, a car, a water pump, a thresher, and a tractor.

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TABLE -1**Employment Status of Women in South India, 2005-2006**

State	Employed in the 12 Months Preceding the Survey		Not Employed in the 12 Months Preceding the Survey (%)	Total (%)	Percentage Earning Cash out of Employment (%)
	Currently Employed* (%)	Currently Not Employed (%)			
India	36.3	6.5	57.2	100	64.2
Andhra Pradesh	49.6	2.5	47.8	100	83.6
Karnataka	40.2	6.1	53.7	100	72.0
Kerala	27.9	2.4	69.7	100	91.3
Tamil Nadu	46.2	3.6	50.2	100	89.9

* Currently employed persons are persons who were employed in the seven days preceding the survey
Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

TABLE - 2**Women's Level of Education and Literacy in South India, 2005-2006 (percentage)**

States	No Education	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Total	Percentage Literate
India	40.6	8	39.5	12	100	55.1
Andhra Pradesh	45.4	8.1	37.8	8.8	100	49.6
Karnataka	33.6	8.4	44.5	13.5	100	59.7
Kerala	3.9	7.8	62.6	25.7	100	93
Tamil Nadu	21.7	10.1	49	19.2	100	69.4

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

TABLE - 3

Housing Characteristics of Households in South India, 2005-2006(percentage)

State	Percentage					Mean number of persons per room used for sleeping
	With electricity	With improved source of drinking water	With toilet facility	Using solid fuel for cooking	Living in a pucca house	
India	67.9	87.9	44.6	70.8	45.9	3.3
Andhra Pradesh	88.4	94.0	42.4	66.3	56.3	3.2
Karnataka	89.3	86.2	46.5	63.8	55.1	3.4
Kerala	91.0	69.1	96.1	71.4	85.1	2.2
Tamil Nadu	88.6	93.5	42.9	60.5	69.9	2.9

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

TABLE - 4

Wealth Quintiles of Households in South India, 2005-2006 (percentage)

State	Wealth Quintiles					Total
	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Fourth</i>	<i>Highest</i>	
India	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	100
Andhra Pradesh	10.8	17.6	29.2	25.4	17.1	100
Karnataka	10.8	22.2	24.0	23.2	19.8	100
Kerala	1.0	4.1	12.2	37.8	44.8	100
Tamil Nadu	10.6	15.6	29.9	24.4	19.5	100

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

TABLE - 5 Women's Participation in Decision Making

States	<i>Percentage of women who usually make specific decisions alone or jointly with their husband</i>					
	Own health care	Making major household purchase	Making purchase for daily household needs	Visit to her family or relatives	Percentage of women who participate in all four decisions	Percentage of women who participate in none of the four decisions
India	62.2	52.9	60.1	60.5	36.7	20.5
Andhra Pradesh	61.8	52.7	60.4	65.5	40.4	24.3
Karnataka	53.3	50.5	56.4	55.9	35.2	26.9
Kerala	75.3	61.8	65.9	78.4	47.2	10.8
Tamil Nadu	73.2	63.3	77.8	76.7	48.8	8.2

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

Table - 6 Women's Access to Money and Credit

States	Women's access to money		Women's knowledge and use of micro credit programme	
	Percentage who have money and that they can decide how to use	Percentage who have a bank account that they themselves use	Percentage who know of a micro credit programme	Percentage who have taken a loan from a micro credit programme
India	44.6	15.0	38.6	4.0
Andhra Pradesh	48.6	18.0	59.6	16.3
Karnataka	60.3	22.1	55.0	9.2
Kerala	20.7	27.0	82.6	8.0
Tamil Nadu	25.4	15.8	79.0	13.4

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06

Table - 7

Control over Women's Cash Earnings, 2005-2006 (percentage)

State	<i>Alone or jointly with their husband decide how they spend their own earnings are used</i>
India	80.9
Andhra Pradesh	68.8
Karnataka	71.5
Kerala	89.7
Tamil Nadu	87.5

Source: NFHS 3, 2005-06