

Introduction

I. INTRODUCTION

"A woman can say more in a sigh than a man can say in a sermon"

- Arnold Haultain

*"Empowering of women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation.
Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their
value systems lead to the development of a good family,
good society and ultimately a good nation"*

- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Women constitute half of the humanity and they have to play a very important role in the national development of any country. They are equally important in the development of any family, community or a nation. They play a very crucial role in the family sustainability, stability and growth. Even though their role is accepted by all but still women are not empowered to the level as expected in the case of men. The education of girls and women has been recognized for several decades as a fundamental human rights and a development necessity (Metha, 2000).

Education is the strategic - instrument that has its impact on social and economic status of women. Apart from providing facilities for education of women, it is also important to train the women so as to enhance their skill, thinking ability, self-confidence and participation in decision-making process. Empowerment helps women to access to the new world of knowledge, leading to make new information choices in both their personal and public lives. Women empowerment process must evolve a new undertaking of power and experiment with ways of democratizing and sharing power building, new mechanisms for collective responsibility, decision making and accountability (Agarwal, 2000).

In recent years, the focus of planning has shifted from equipping women from their traditional roles of housewives and mothers to recognizing their worth as procurers, making a major contribution to family and national income. Efforts have been made over the past three decades of planned development to enrol more girls in schools and encourage their stay in schools and contribute to their education as long as possible, and to provide non-formal educational opportunities for women (Rath, 1999).

Empowerment of women means becoming independent and self-reliant. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors. As women are oppressed they need to be empowered in all walks of life. Thus, women empowerment is a basic human right where she wants neither to beg for power nor search for power hierarchy to exercise power against others. Women and their problems have acquired growing importance in our social milieu over the last few decades (Anitha, 2000).

It is needed to revamp the entire approach towards women, emphasizing the future challenges which the country has to face in the coming years. Consumer rights are life's human rights which are recognized as the fundamental rights of a human being and women make tremendous contribution to society by their productive, reproductive and household work. The quality of life enjoyed by them is extremely important for the welfare of entire family (Gupta, 2002).

Our women, who have a glorious past, lived a life of disgrace in post Vedic era. But they are regaining their lost respectful status in society now. Educational and economic empowerment to women is to develop their conscience and economic participation in family, community and national productivity. The choice the consumer makes will depend on the education and income level (Sharveswara, 1999).

Social welfare is an organized system in social services and institutions, designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health. It aims at personal and social relationships which permit individuals the development of their capacities and the promotion of their well being in harmony with the needs of community (Siva, 2003).

Social welfare is generally understood as some organized means of protecting the interest and promoting the well being of the poor, needy, downtrodden, under privileged, backward, mentally, physically or otherwise handicapped. In the Indian context it is meant to provide services to the under privileged, disadvantaged and backward sections of the society. The most advanced and developed countries regard social welfare as guaranteeing minimum standards of living for their citizens (Yadav, 2000).

Social welfare programmes aims at enabling the deprived sections of the population to overcome their social, economic or physical handicaps and improve their quality of life. They supplement the developmental programmes in general in dealing with the problems of poverty and unemployment and are meant in particular, to assist the most, disadvantaged groups below the poverty line, especially children from poor families, women and the infirm (www.google.com).

The scope of social welfare is more difficult to define. The reason is that the area of social welfare activity has changed from time to time. It has identified new needs as societies have passed from the primitive to the peasant or feudal and industrial stages. The services are offered as social services through insurance, contributory health insurance etc (Gore, 2000).

A flood of literature on the problems concerning women in the more advanced countries have come out. But very few of these works could serve the desired objectives in terms of composite content and perspective. Now the debate on women's welfare and development has affected

the intellectual community as well and there has developed a ranging discussion on what should constitute the agenda of women's development (Saumya Kushwaha, 2003).

The country has no doubt made spectacular strides in promoting the interests of women, with the advent of independence a new era had began for women. The constitution has guaranteed them equality of status and opportunities. There are, in fact, a wide range of constitutional and legal provisions for protecting and safe guarding the interest of women's development. These programmes lay emphasis on providing equal opportunities to women by removing gender bias, empowering women and creating self-reliance groups. It stresses in the adoption of a holistic approach to women's development encompassing education, health and employment (Dhanlaxmi, 2005).

The process of women's empowerment is multidimensional. It enables women to realize their full potential and empower them in all sphere of life. Empowerment as a concept, therefore, encompasses their political empowerment economic independence and social upliftment. The concept of empowerment of mother and girl child as a goal of development project and progarmme has been gaining wider acceptance (Anupama, 2005).

The world is undergoing tremendous changes affecting every aspect of human development. It is no more possible, nor is it desirable to keep away half of the population consisting of women from taking part in the development of a nation. The effect should be to remove all obstacles in the way of their active participation and empower them with all requisite to pave the way for a better life for all. The nation's progress depends on the development of women (Annakodi, 2006).

Traditional social welfare services also covered the needs of widow's, destitute and old women through condensed courses, literacy classes, maternity and medical services for women in need. As a matter of fact this effort helped a limited number of women. In the seventies and eighties a movement led by women activists resulted in several legal, economic and organizational steps for women's development. The concept of women empowerment took birth and shook the bureaucracy, political parties, legislature and judiciary. Thus a movement started with those women's issues and problems which were debated at various forums of NGO's, and resulted in the establishment of

- i. National and State commission for women
- ii. A division of Women's Development in the ministry of HRD
- iii. A division for research and training in the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development
- iv. Women's studies centre's in universities aided by the UGC
- v. Women cells as part of policy infrastructure
- vi. Women legal aid cells in district courts.

A large number of voluntary agencies which are working for the women's uplift have in the past worked in the field of women's welfare. In fact this was the only impact in women's welfare. Some of these and many new organizations have come up and had taken various aspects of women development and empowerment. These areas of work include creation of awareness about women's affairs and problem, reorganizing voluntary effort towards new approach to women's issues (Chowdhry, 2000)

The Ministry of Community Development and The Central Social Welfare Board are working at the grass root level. These organizations have to be made aware of developmental needs and problems of women and their role in this regard. However despite this voluntary effort there is much to be desired so far as women's needs problems and aspirations are concerned more welfare

packages cannot help women who constitute around 50 percent of our population to participate effectively in nation building programmes much less helping themselves. This calls for radical changes in our education, judicial, economic and social structure, so women can play an effective role in social development (Nagalakshmi, 2005).

Government has introduced many development and welfare programmes for women. Those programmes are aimed at providing financial and technical assistance for poor women to start self employment units. Some of the important programmes implemented by the government with reference to women's development corporation and central social welfare board are also entrusted with women development programmes through financial assistance and generate employment for women (Acharya, 2005)

Hence, the present study "Efficacy of Welfare Programmes for Women in Coimbatore District in Tamil Nadu" is an attempt to find out the details of women beneficiaries who are utilizing the welfare programmes implemented by the Government, and carried out by the department of social welfare with the following objectives:

- Study the socio-economic profile of the selected women beneficiaries
- Assess the inputs bestowed on the women beneficiaries and
- Constraints faced by the women beneficiaries.