

Empowerment of Women Flower Vendors: A Sociological Study in the Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal

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By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled '*Empowerment of Women Flower Vendors: A Sociological Study in the Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal*' is submitted by Labani Dey under my Supervision and guidance. This thesis is original in nature and has not been submitted earlier for any other degree or diploma, whatsoever, by the candidate.

The candidate has fulfilled all criteria required under the rules of Vidyasagar University to do this work and submit the thesis. I am forwarding the thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, Vidyasagar University for evaluation by experts.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

A widespread enumeration on the women's status of our society shows that gender inequality prevails in one form or other throughout the world. Therefore, to establish gender equality, there is a need for the empowerment of women in society. Recently, empowerment is generally associated with the development of women and various approaches as well as strategic measures for the empowerment of women are being carried out in India. In addition, it is observed that women empowerment is the foremost and basic component in the way of development of the society as a whole. Empowerment may be achieved through income-generation activities.

Women throughout the world remain discriminated and exploited. So far as India is concerned, the structure of the society, cultural prejudices are act as an important factors for justifying women's role and their social status in society. The Indian Constitution assured equality and prohibits any kinds of discrimination to women. In spite of this, the deeply entrenched customs and traditions, beliefs and practices of a largely patriarchal and feudal past and present contribute to the sustained subordination of women.

Now, as women are the world's largest excluded group and receive only a small share of developmental opportunities they are called as silent majority, 'pace makers of development', thus without their development and progress there cannot be any real

development in the world and if national development and women's development have to be purposive and relevant, women have to become equal partners and participants for which women empowerment is very much needed.

The term women empowerment, which has gained currency during the years 1976-1996, emanated from the Feminists belong to the developing nations and it is related to the struggle to achieve social justice and equal distribution of the power by the women. Though the term is popular and often used in our society but its proper definition and as well as the proper measurement is still not being properly understood. It is generally used to explain the method where the incapability in the decision making process gets minimised and the control over their decision making and resources can be maximized. This is due to the fact the term itself containing the term 'power'. Thus, empowerment is generally related to the power and specifically it refers to the enhancement of power. Now, power can be defined as the process of controlling the resources and ideology which can be implemented through the capacity of decision-making. If we accept this definition, then it is clear that woman in general and poor woman, in particular, are relatively powerless because they does not possess controlling over own resources which further leads to either a less or zero power of decision-making. Therefore, executing the decision over own resource, ideology and it leads to power and which further can be called as empowerment.

In another words, 'empowerment' can be defined as a metric of activities consist of self-awareness and self-declaration to efficiently participate in a project by

considering control in their decision making with respect to their life. Thus it is clear that empowerment is a process and not a product.

The empowerment process consist of the development in social as well as physical condition, equivalent rate for taking part in the process of decision making, controlling the rights on resources and lastly to create the environment for continuously gaining these achievements. The empowerment process can be started and supported by the gaining the independence over economic resources. This includes the accessibility and right over the resources of production. Knowledge is the second important element of empowerment. Third is participation fourth is self-image and the final is autonomy, besides the goal of empowerment is to: challenge subordination and subjugation and transform the structures, systems and institutions.

Women's empowerment can be defined as a method of transforming the society when women can achieve the control and rights over resources. Therefore, it can affect directly to their decision. The empowerment process gives more space to women through which they can critically re-examine their lives. It helps to enable women to find out new ways to solve their problems and provides them the analytical power to understand the social environment and find out their strengths. It also helps them to acquire new knowledge and skills which further leads to a more control over their rights and resources. And it brings gender equality in a very rational way.

Empowerment is multi-dimensional in nature. And the dimensions can be categorized in five broad sub-heads like social, economic, political, cultural and legal. Education plays a vital role in the process of social empowerment of women. Education is a

powerful instrument since it enables women to gain more knowledge about the outside world, skills, self-image and self-confidence. Employment has not only provided economic independence but also has enabled women to take decisions about physical mobility, sharing their opinion about their problems. The process of Political empowerment makes women enabled to stimulate the power of decision-making by participating into a political structure. The term, cultural empowerment can be defined as a process where male counterpart in the society should understand that women development is essential. In this regard, women should understand they're not in the sub-ordinate position and they can play the same role as men do in the society. Women empowerment can also achieve through the execution of legal rights prevail in the society. Therefore, laws for women play a vital role in their empowerment process. So, there is a need for the development of all the aspects in a balanced way, otherwise the prospect of empowerment of women will remain a mere illusion rather than to become a tangible reality.

Welfare approach, poverty-alleviation approach and equality approach were respectively implemented by the Indian Government to pursue women's development. Some important instrument for women empowerment taken by the Indian Government are right to education, right to access health care, employment generation programme, reservation, access to the knowledge over their rights etc.

In India, the aspects of empowerment such as socio-economic, legal and political empowerment of women were mostly prioritized than the women's cultural

empowerment. But women empowerment through employment, education and their power over the making the decisions are not enough if cultural empowerment is absent. This is due to the fact that cultural empowerment enables women to attain social recognition. The cultural empowerment can be attained through awareness and consciousness about the society.

Due to the shortcomings in the on-going approaches and strategies for the empowerment of women in India, alternate approaches and strategies have been suggested. The empowerment of women can be done by considering the following strategies: first, introduction of integrated approach which enables women to make decision over socio-economic, legal, political, cultural phenomenon; second, women mobilization strategy which enables them to take decisions at their personal front as well as in political and social level; lastly, the strategy of gender sensitive participatory process which implies the development of the social relationship between men and women where women hold a lower position. Therefore, the term, women empowerment does not includes the approach of gaining power but also includes the power which is derived from economic independence, social awareness, education etc.

Indian development planning has always aimed at removing inequalities in the process of development to guarantee that the fruits of development are an equal benefit of all. And a thorough review of the women development policies in India gives us an idea that over the years approaches for women development have shifted from one direction to another.

Based on the policies of women, various programmes have been formulated by the both the state as well as central government for the women empowerment. Besides, recognizing the fact that socio-economic empowerment is the foremost and basic component in the overall women empowerment, local as well national governmental in India has begun to play an important role in mobilizing women to become economically strong by providing encouraging packages in the form of poverty alleviation programmes and income generation programmes. Several anti-poverty programmes such as IRDP, TRYSEM, NREP, RLEGP, DWCRA, JRY, RMK, EAS, MSY, IAY and IMY have been targeted to rural poor women and innovative approaches have been adopted in these programmes both for improving their socio-economic conditions and that of their families. These programmes were initiated to transform the employment scenario in informal sector from self to wage employability.

An acute assessment related to women empowerment programmes and schemes especially designed for the economic empowerment of women seem quite attractive level, but things do not seem to go right in practice. Most of the problems arise at the time of implementation. Either, it is inadequate training and skills, half-hearted attitude and aptitude, lack of sufficient resources or gendered thinking of the concerned officials and functionaries that hinder the effective implementation of the programmes. Corruption is another important factor adding to failure stories of many women empowerment programmes. Lack of work culture is another cause of the dooming of effects from the state side at the time of designing a specific programme.

The programmes are thus not improving the overall economic status of women and they are merely, bringing some women within their ambit and integrating them in the development process, leaving out women's empowerment a majority.

In this backdrop, the present study has endeavoured to reveal some critical insight about the women's increasing entry into flower industry and our study is in the view of the encounters of women flower vendors engaged in the vending market platforms of Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal. Generally, women are making advances into new occupations including those prior commanded by man. Yet, writing on the subject have over and over cautioned us to be careful about the way that women's employment activity and also their improvement are interned transcendently by ideological and sex contemplations in the work market. The rationale of casual division being the main reserve of women is hence addressed and this exploration is wanted to concentrate on the issues identified with occupation of women in the flower vending zone. The findings of this research are to be evaluated with regard to women empowerment through participating in the flower vending business in Purba Medinipur District. In the various flower market of Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal, Women flower vendors enhances their empowerment level. In this regard, the determinants of empowerment related women flower vendors are their level of income, physical wellbeing, educational attainment, and times spent for the business.

In the conclusion part, the result of the study has been speculated. The elements of Women Empowerment are multi-dimensional in nature. Those variables are personal, rural-urban, governmental, professional, economic, social, legal and political. These

variables are well-acquainted in terms of age, religion, monthly income, savings, community, family types, marital status, house types, educational status, occupational status and membership in any group and years of experience of the respondents.

An aggregate of 200 women flower vendors were interviewed for the study through a well-structured interview schedule. Interviews were conducted mostly and took place in the local language or neighbourhood dialect i.e. Bengali. The interviewer also took the opportunity of observing women flower vendors by being a non-participant observer as well as by being present in those markets during the field work period and respectively data collection days.

The key findings of our study can be summarized and presented in the light of our hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that majority of the women flower vendor in Purba Medinipur district does not find them empowered according to their economic decision making power. Based on the economic decision making index, a component of women empowerment index, it clearly shows the mean value is 0.81 which is greater than 0.50.

Now, to test the null hypothesis when population standard deviation is unknown, we have to go through the following steps:

Let, the population mean = μ ; sample mean = \bar{x} ; sample standard deviation = s , where the number of samples = n .

In this regard, as a value less than or equal to 0.5 in accordance with the empowerment indices represent the dearth of empowerment according to UNDP, therefore, we set the population mean i.e., $\mu=0.5$.

Now, from economic decision making indices (EDMI) we have the mean of EDMI i.e., $\bar{x}=0.81$ and the standard deviation of EDMI is $s= 0.19971$.

The total sample size is, $n= 200$.

Now, the null hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x} = \mu$, and that of the alternative hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x} > \mu$.

Now, assuming normal distribution, the test statistic can be written as:

$$T = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s / (\text{Square root of } n)}$$

From the above data, we have the test result as follows:

Table 7.1: One Sample T-Test result on EDMI

	Test Value = 0.5					
	t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance. (two-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
EDMI	22.040	199	.000	.31125	.2834	.3391

Now, at the 1% level of significance, the null hypothesis can be rejected from the critical region approach, if, $t \geq t_{0.025,199} = 2.581$. Therefore, we failed to accept the null hypothesis because, $t= 22.040 > 2.581$.

Therefore, we can accept the research hypothesis i.e., the alternative hypothesis which argues that the women flower vendors found themselves **empowered** in accordance with their power over economic decision. The score indicates high degree of execution of their power over economic decision.

The main reason behind this finding basically depends on their execution of power over their economic decision making factors. In our study, it is very remarkable to point out that the majority of women flower vendors are independent in their economic decisions.

The second hypothesis of our study is, “larger part of the women participating in flower vending business does not find themselves empowered in terms of household decision making process”. Now, from our study, we find that the average value of house hold decision making index is 0.93. This mean value clearly depicts that the women are also very much independent in terms of their household decision making power.

Now, to test the null hypothesis when population standard deviation is unknown, we have to gone through the following steps:

Let, the population mean = μ ; sample mean = \bar{x} ; sample standard deviation = s , and the number of samples = n .

In this regard, as a value less than or equal to 0.5 in accordance with the empowerment indices represent the dearth of empowerment according to UNDP, that's why we set the population mean i.e., $\mu=0.5$.

Now, from household decision making indices (HDMI) we have the mean of HDMI i.e., $\bar{x}=0.93$ and the standard deviation of HDMI is $s= 0.13367$.

The total sample size is, $n= 200$.

Now, the null hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x} = \mu$, and that of the alternative hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x} > \mu$.

Now, assuming normal distribution the test statistic can be written as:

$$T = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s / (\text{Square root of } n)}$$

From the above data, we have the test result as follows:

Table 7.2: One Sample T-Test result on HDMI

	Test Value = 0.5					
	t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance. (two-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
HDMI	45.847	199	.000	.43333	.4147	.4520

Now, at the 1% level of significance, the null hypothesis can be rejected from the critical region approach, if, $t \geq t_{0.025,199} = 2.581$. Therefore, we failed to accept the null hypothesis because, $t= 45.847 > 2.581$.

This result may be an outcome of the social status of women flower vendors in Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal, as now society treats them as an income earner in

the family and thus their choice over household decision making process makes an independent stand point in their favour.

In lieu of our third hypothesis, we found that majority of the women participating in this business found themselves to be empowered in terms of their physical mobility which is also proved from the result obtained from our study (PMI= 0.76> 0.50).

Now, to test the null hypothesis when population standard deviation is unknown, we have to follow the following steps:

Let, the population mean = μ ; sample mean = \bar{x} ; sample standard deviation = s , and the number of samples = n .

In this regard, as a value less than or equal to 0.5 in accordance with the empowerment indices represent the dearth of empowerment according to UNDP, that's why we set the population mean i.e., $\mu=0.5$.

Now, from physical mobility index (PMI) we have the mean of PMI i.e., $\bar{x}=0.76$ and the standard deviation of PMI is $s= 0.24638$.

The total sample size is, $n= 200$.

Now, the null hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x} = \mu$, and that of the alternative hypothesis can be written as, $\bar{x}>\mu$.

Now, assuming normal distribution the test statistic can be written as:

$$T = \frac{\bar{x}-\mu}{s/\sqrt{n}}$$

From the above data, we have the test result as follows:

Table 7.3: One Sample T-Test result on PMI

	Test Value = 0.5					
	t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance. (two-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PMI	15.211	199	.000	.26500	.2306	.2994

Now, at the 1% level of significance, the null hypothesis can be rejected from the critical region approach if, $t \geq t_{0.025,199} = 2.581$. Therefore, we failed to accept the null hypothesis because, $t = 15.211 > 2.581$.

In this context, it is very crucial to point out that, according to GGGI (2015) published by WEF shows India ranks 108 among 142 countries. The average empowerment index of women was 0.34 by considering the average of the dimensions as economic decision making, educational attainment, health status and political participation. In another article, published in Hindustan Times news-paper (April 6th, 2017) by Samarth Bansal, considering the same dimensions shows that in India, West Bengal placed in 18th rank when compared to the other states in India in accordance with its Women Empowerment Index (WEI Score is 0.33). In this regard, when we compare these two scores with our study we found that there is a noteworthy difference. Our study reveals that women flower vendor somehow manage to score higher than both the state as well as in national level in accordance with women empowerment index.

Thus, we may say that the women flower vendors has achieved higher level of empowerment through this business.

To prove this we can follow the same procedure to test the hypothesis regarding EDMI, HDMI & PMI. With respect to WEI, $\bar{x}=0.84$, $s = 0.11924$ and $n= 200$.

The t-test result can be presented in the following table.

Table 7.4: One Sample T-Test result on WEI

	Test Value = 0.5					
	T	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance. (two-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
WEI	40.005	199	.000	.33730	.3207	.3539

Now, at the 1% level of significance, the null hypothesis can be rejected from the critical region approach, if, $t \geq t_{0.025,199} = 2.581$. Therefore, we failed to accept the null hypothesis because, $t= 40.005 > 2.581$.

Therefore, it is very crucial to point out that from above mentioned statistical test our results regarding the WEI and its related indices significantly differ from the national level as well as state level statistics on WEI. So, these results scientifically confirmed that women flower vendors are empowered for the concerned district.

Now, out of the sample of 200 women flower vendors, age profile of women flower vendors reveals that larger portion of women flower vendors are under the age group of below 40 years. From the age distribution pattern, we may say that the work burden

in the flower vending business does not suited the old-age women due to their health conditions and other family related issues at home front. It is also found that religion-wise classification of women flower vendors shows that majority of the respondents are Hindus. Our study also reveals majority of the respondents are from the General caste community implying a caste dominated business structure.

With regard to marital status the respondents were broadly classified as unmarried, married, divorcee, and widow. From our study, we found that the larger portions of the women flower vendors are married. It is very much crucial to point out that the respondents belonging to nuclear family are better empowered.

With regard to membership in SHG, majority of the women exhibits that they are not member in any SHGs. This may be interpreted as: flower vending strengthening them more than the women who are engaging in SHGs.

Majority of the women argue that the primary reasons behind to come in Flower Vending business is to support family financially after family head's death or separation. Some other reasons are there in forms of family business and profit motivation.

In recent years, it is a well-established fact that lack of education act as an obstacle to the process of development. Though the years of schooling for girl child increases in recent years, but due to lack of family support affects the self-perception of women. This necessarily limits the nature and scope of employability of the women.

In our study, It can be found that educational level-wise classification of women flower vendors shows that 8 (4%) respondents of total 200 sample women flower vendors are illiterate, 20 (10%) of them are just literate, 126(63%) have completed their education up to primary level, 30 (15%) have studied up to upper primary, 16(8%) of them have completed their education up to Higher Secondary level. Therefore, the majority of the women have the primary level of education; whereas, on an average 23% women flower vendors have upper primary & higher degree of education. Based on the above discussion, we may say that the position in accordance with education of women related to flower vending business in Purba Medinipur District is quite satisfactory. Therefore, we may say that the satisfactory educational status of women flower vendors enables them to acquire information about market opportunities, knowledge of the pros and cons involved courage and confidence to overcome possible obstacles and the ability to be equal to the task at hand. In this regard, the strategy to execute decision making power by the women related to flower vending business in Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal may enlighten through their educational attainment.

It is very much interesting to note that from monthly income classification of women flower vendors that a greater part of the respondents are earning a monthly income of below Rs. 10,000, while, 18.5% respondents are earning Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 and the rest of the 2.5% respondents' income is above Rs. 20,000. Now, based on CLI constructed for the agricultural labourers, which can be assumed to be relevant for all rural people, the poverty line in West Bengal has been calculated at Rs. 170.40/- per

month per person. However, it will too limited to confined ourselves to this definition and consider all households having monthly income of Rs. 600/- and less a low income households. The main reason for this is that a monthly income of Rs. 600/- for a household with an average size of five persons, yields a per capita income of Rs. 120/-. Thus, our cut-off point (Rs. 120/- per capita) lies below the line constructed by Minhas¹. As a result, we can be reasonably sure that households having income levels of Rs. 600/- per month can be considered lying below the poverty line.

In lieu of this definition, we observed that, majority of the women flower vendors (96%) belong to the middle class and or upper middle class & or upper class with respect to their income distribution.

Thus, our analysis of women's status reveals that women who are engaging in flower vending business in the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal in the present age found themselves empowered. Though, poverty overlaid with long standing patterns of discrimination creates living conditions for women in a marginally harsh manner through the restriction of their access to basic services. The flower vending jobs somehow creates a positive framework for being economically independent to the women. It also enables them to execute their power through political participation and the rate of power execution is high in this regard. Therefore, through the flower vending business, the women flower vendors become empowered in terms of socio-economic conditions which in turn lead to all sorts of development to the women. Intra-family relationships and household work culture would change bringing in social empowerment and a more equitable participation of women in decisions

concerning the family. Leadership and dynamic or active participation in group culture would improve political understanding and ultimately help successful political empowerment. Political empowerment thusly would result more representatives in planning for women and a reinforcing and sustaining of the process of overall empowerment of women.