

Importance of Women's Empowerment for the Nation's Development

Sheshrao Kautkar and Rehana Raj*

ICAR-Central Institute for Research on Cotton Technology (ICAR-CIRCOT),
Nagpur - 400 019 Maharashtra

*ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (ICAR-CIFT), Cochin - 682 029, Kerala
E Mail: rehanaraj9@gmail.com

राष्ट्रस्यश्वः नारीअस्ति ।
नारीराष्ट्रस्यअक्शिशअस्ति ॥
नारीअस्यसमाजस्यकुशलवास्तुकाराअस्ति ।
जननीजन्मभूमिश्चस्वर्गात्अपिगरीयसी ॥
यत्रनार्यस्तुपूज्यन्तेरमन्तेतत्रदेवताः
नारीशक्तिशक्तिशालीसमाजस्यनिर्माणंकरोति ॥

As stated in the Sanskrit Shloka mentioned above, the whole world has now understood that empowering women of the country not only make a successful society but also plays a vital role in making any nation powerful and strong. Experts define women empowerment as "the ability of a woman to claim enabling resources, exercise voice and agency, and act on desires to transform her own life in context where this ability has been denied". In India, women were considered as slave and prominently used to continue the family dynasty in the male-dominant society, but now

the situation has changed. Women have raised the flag of their strength, hard work and dedication in every field that may be Deepa Malik, the first Indian women to win a medal in Paralympic games in 2016, Lieutenant Shivangi Singh, first women fighter pilot of India to fly Rafale combat aircraft in 2020, K.K. Shailaja, Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Govt. of Kerala who has set an example in the world by implementing effective guidelines to fight against Covid-19 disease or Nirmala Sitaraman, who become India's first full-time Finance Minister.



Deepa Malik



Shivangi Singh



K.K. Shailaja



Nirmala Sitaraman

When India's GDP was contracted by 23.9% in the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21 during the Covid-19 pandemic, all the sectors were touching a negative figure whereas agriculture was the only sector where the GDP was in the positive side (3.4%). One of the main reasons for India's positive agricultural output is the day and night working farm women. According to FAOSTAT and FAO, women comprise over 40% of agricultural labor force in the developing countries and represented a share of 24% in fisheries and aquaculture in India. Women also play a significant role in livestock, poultry and



labor market of agricultural activities.

It is a well known fact that, women's education, earning, status and social freedom are associated with positive impact on nutritional status. When women's income rises they tend to invest more in nutritional health of their families. To take benefits of women's full potential, our society need to improve certain things like elimination of early age marriage, avoiding early and too many pregnancies, increasing access and control on family income, reducing area and time of work boundaries, increasing involvement in decision making and enhancing knowledge about good nutrition. The urban women's are well aware of these things but as the majority of our population is located in rural India, we need to empower our rural wemen in order to achieve a complete nutritional goal.



Malnutrition presently affects 50% of the world's population and it is one of the main cause of about 45% death in children below five years. Drastically increasing population, busy urban lifestyle, junk food consumption, lack of nutritional knowledge and unhygienic processing practices are few reasons behind malnutrition. The impact of climate change and uncontrolled use of pesticides, preservatives and other chemicals in agricultural products affect negatively on food and nutritional security. In many societies, women are responsible for the procurement, preparation, and allocation of food and ultimately preserving food culture and therefore, in order to achieve nutritional justice, the women needs to be educated and empowered in terms of nutritional aspects. Even though women farmers are responsible for 60-80% of the overall food production in developing countries, their rights and socio-economic status are rarely equal to those of men, and this disempowerment undermines their ability to attain food and nutritional security. When women are empowered, not only do they become more efficient and productive, but also they give future generations a better start in life. In the Coronavirus pandemic situation, everyone has become health conscious now and searching for healthy and nutritious food. The pandemic didn't end up till now and the experts are saying that such type of helpless situations may strike the world in future also. Therefore, this is the right time to spare our valuable time,

money and brain in empowering the women of each and every part of the country in a right way to fight against such crises.

In past few years, India has come up with lot of simple, low cost and easy innovations which could be effectively used by women. Examples of this which includes *Panipuri* machines, small scale on-farm processing machines, farm driers, varieties of food products from agricultural commodities or Government initiated mega food parks. These are few of the examples from which the needy women can be benefitted. The scientists of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), through *Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav* initiative or under any other program should educate, motivate and strengthen the women force of our country. The women-friendly farm equipment's, technologies or any other innovation which can be beneficial for women to improve their socio-economic status and finally nutritional status of their family should be popularized.

A group of women's from the *Kudumbasree's Amma Ruchi* Project of Kalamassery Municipality, Cochin, Kerala is running electric auto rickshaw's armed with kitchen unit successfully. Likewise, in 2018, Karnataka Chief Minister Shri Siddaramaiah has launched 30 *Saviruchi Sanchari* canteens for federation of *Stree Shakti* groups in all 30 districts and handed over keys of the modified two-wheelers to 100 differently-abled women. These are the examples of real women



Kudumbasree's Amma Ruchi Project



Launching of Saviruchi Sanchari canteens

empowerment where unemployed and differently-abled women have come together to utilize their skills and start earning with serving healthy nutritious and home-made like food to the customers. Recently the Punjab government approved 33% of quota for women for direct recruitment in state civil services and this is one of the important steps in women empowerment. It is very much needed to take such good action for the betterment of women and the society. Such moves can automatically help in achieving the nutritional goal of the country by empowering the women in starting their own business to earn more and to spend more on nutrition and health benefits.

Unfortunately, some parts of the country are still not ready to accept the change and few social miscreants don't want women to get empowered. Recently occurred *Hathras* gang rape case of Uttar Pradesh, *Baran* rape case of Rajasthan, day to day domestic violence, the mind set of parents to ask their daughters back to home before 7.00 PM or

hostel time restrictions from several universities, colleges and other institutions are the live examples of male-dominant brutality in India and the government should set up strict and fast punishment laws against such mentality. The father of Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in one of his quote has mentioned: *"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved"*.

Also, the great Indian philosopher and monk Swami Vivekananda once said: *"There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved"*.

Both of these *Mahatma's* have clearly told that to make the country better and comfortable for living, our women should be educated, strengthened and empowered. Achieving the goal of better child nutrition, healthy immune system, overall nutrition or a healthy and nutritious nation is possible only with complete women empowerment in all the ways, in all parts of the country, irrespective of cast, community, age etc.