

Empowerment of Rural Dalit Women in Tamilnadu - An Empirical Evidence

Dr. K. Maheswari

Assistant Professor,

Department of Population Studies,

Annamalai University

Abstract

Women have been the backbone of Indian economy, who are shouldering multifarious responsibilities in household chores. In this scenario, rural women multifarious responsibilities in household chores. In this scenario, rural women play a critical role in the process of moving their families out of poverty, around 30 per cent to 35 per cent of the rural Indian households are estimated as headed by women. But in rural India, empowerment of women is still complicated due to the dominance of patriarchal society. But the women from the rural society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic asset in their society. Say for example, women belonging to small and marginal farm households work not only on their own uneconomical fields, but supplement family earnings by working on others field too. But, they are still lagging far behind in the various walks of life like education, employment, health, economic empowerment, etc., Particularly, Women belonging to Dalit communities are multi-exploited for being born as women in the Hindu culture and as lower caste group. They are oppressed as women in their own society and are also marginalized in all aspects of individual development viz., social, economic and political. In this context, rural Dalit women are in capacities to pursue any independent economic activity due to lack of motivation, to access resources etc., will hasten the pace of sustainable rural development. The present study makes an attempt to highlight the status and level of empowerment obtained from the rural Dalit women as well as to suggest suitable remedial measures to overcome the situations at grassroots level. In this backdrop, the present study makes an attempt to highlight the socioeconomic status, attitude of girl child and level of empowerment obtained from the rural Dalit women. The present study has been conducted in Karur District, Tamil nadu.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have been the backbone of Indian economy, who are shouldering multifarious responsibilities in household chores. In this scenario, rural women play a pivotal role in the process of moving their families out of poverty, around 30 per cent to 35 per cent of the rural Indian households are estimated as headed by women. But in rural India, empowerment of women is still complicated due to the dominance of patriarchal society. In spite of the great expansion of education in the country after independence, the progress of literacy among women still presents a depressing picture. Low level of education, Although the rate of literacy among women has increased from 7.93 per cent in 1951 census to 65.46 percent in 2011. It is far behind male literacy rate in the country. (24.95 per cent 1951 census to 82.14 per cent 2001 census.) In higher education front, access to higher education remains a problem for women in India. The recent statistics annual UGC report of the 2010-11 revealed that women enrolled for higher education. (100:70). It is not good and equal but it is satisfactory by the comparison of 1950-51 (100:14). Lack of access to health care is another issues, The percentage of anaemia ranges from 38 percentage in Punjab to 63 percentage in Orissa. Anaemia prevalence is alarming among pregnant women. IMR has gone down but gender differences persist (National Family Health Survey-3, 2005-06) Party politics, money power/muscle power and feminization of poverty were steadily undercut and eroded gender justice. Tripathy and Das (1991) in their study rightly pointed out that women in our society are subjected to several socio-economic constraints and discriminations.

Therefore, the vision of inclusiveness must go beyond the traditional objective of poverty alleviation to encompass equality of opportunity, as well as economic and social mobility for all sections of society. In a nutshell, the equal opportunity to all with freedom and dignity and without social or political obstacles. It is accompanied by an expansion in the opportunities for economic and social advancement. In particular, individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups should be provided special opportunities to develop their skills and participate in the development dialogue. Empowerment of disadvantaged and hitherto marginalised groups is therefore an essential part and parcel of inclusive growth. Hence, the gender equality is a set of asset and capabilities at the individual and at collective level. An attempt has been made to analyse the empowerment of rural dalit women which is the need of the hour. A study of the socio-economic status and level of empowerment in the rural pockets of India would significantly contribute to the development of women.

Research Problem

In a male dominated society like India, men are placed in a more advantageous position than women. In this situation, the issues and challenges faced by women in rural areas are more serious and different in many respects than in urban women. Particularly, rural dalit women are subjected to discrimination right from childhood. Hence, rural dalit women are not able to pursue any independent economic activity due to lack of motivation, access to education etc., In this connection, emerging empowerment of rural dalit women in three spheres of women empowerment viz., social, economic, and political empowerment is an indicator of women's autonomy. In order to overcome the obstacles like social, economic and political empowerment of rural dalit women, the systematic research is an urgent need of the hour. Therefore, the present research study emerged with greater social relevance and importance. In this backdrop, the present study makes an attempt to highlight the socio-economic status, attitude of girl child and level of empowerment obtained by the rural dalit women.

Significance of the Study

Rural poverty in India has a significant gender dimension. Further, the burden of rural poverty falls heavily on rural women who shoulder the work load in poor household with less access to education, health and remunerative work. In this scenario, the great challenge is to develop a village centre development strategy for the marginalized and rural poor. U.N. Millennium Development Goals also iterated on empowerment of rural women and reduction of poverty. Therefore, the gender-based disparities are a matter of concern. Particularly, rural dalit women because of their marginalization could result in a serious adverse consequence on the development path. Thus, it is believed that the present piece of research can bring out the possible policy measurer for strengthening rural dalit women's empowerment in a holistic perspective.

Objectives

The following aspects have been the focus of analysis in the present study.

- to examine socio-economic status of rural dalit women in study villages;
- to explore the attitude of girl child among sample respondents;
- to measure the level of empowerment in the economic, social and political spheres.

Hypotheses

H₀₁ : There is no significant relationship between attitude towards the child and family size, education, occupation and annual income of rural dalit women.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the level of empowerment and socio-economic status of rural dalit women.

Methodology

Structured schedule/questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the respondents in the study villages. The heads of the households were interviewed and in his or her absence any available member of the household was interviewed. The data for the study have been obtained through personal interviews with the help of a pre-designed, field tested schedule. The researcher first developed an item pool based on the subject of the study. These items were given to experts for their opinion with regard to relevance and adequacy for the conduct of the study. On the basis of suggestions from experts, some irrelevant items were dropped and others were modified.

The three parts of the schedule/ questionnaire were sought to obtain details from chosen respondents viz., 1.Socio-economic details 2. Attitude of girl child 3.Level of empowerment. The questions on various aspects of the schedule/questionnaire were arranged in a sequential order and were administered to a sample of 50 respondents for pre-test. Based upon the pre-test, some of the questions were re-ordered and others modified to form the final schedule/questionnaire for the study.

Selection of the Study Area and Sample Villages

Karur District comprises of 9 blocks and 158 village Panchayats. Among the 9 blocks of Karur District, Tamil Nadu, only six blocks were chosen randomly using lottery method for the study viz., Kaduvur Block, Thanthoni Block, K.Paramathy Block, Karur Block, Aravakuruchi Block and Kirushnrayapuram Block in Karur District by resorting to the same sampling method in each of the five blocks, one village was selected. A total of six villages namely, Surumanpatti village, Melapalayam village, Thennilai East village, Arasu Colony village, Sendamangalam west village and Sankarmalaipatti village were selected.

Selection of Sample Respondents

The study was executed among the chosen six villages namely Surumanpatti, Melapalayam, Thennilai East, Arasu Colony, Sendamangalam west and Sankarmalaipatti of Karur District using simple random sampling technique. Hence, 40 respondents were selected from each village. The necessary information in respect of the problem focused have been collected from 240 selected sample respondents.

Results and Discussion

The present research has made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected using structured schedule/questionnaire with the intention of echoing the sample respondents' expressions on level of women empowerment. The results have been presented in the form of frequency tables and cross-tables with suitable statistics like simple percentage, Chi-square test, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and step-wise multiple regression analysis. To examine the Socio-economic status and Level of Empowerment could be understood with the help of the survey undertaken among the sample respondents. For a better understanding of the findings, they have been prearranged under four fold in character, The discussion has been done in a concise manner keeping the objectives and hypotheses in mind. Primary data have been treated with reference to:-

1. Socio-economic status of respondents
2. Attitude of girl Child
3. Level of Empowerment.

Socio-economic status of Respondents

The socio economic features of sample rural dalit women households have been analysed from the collected data from the field survey.

Age-wise classification

It is found that there are 16.3 per cent of rural dalit women households in the age group of 18-20 years, followed by 21-35 years age group (44.2 per cent). The age- group of 36- 45 years, and 46-60 above are 25.4 per cent and 12.9 per cent respectively.

Marital Status

Marital status of sample rural dalit women households reveals that 83.3 per cent are married. 14.6 per cent are unmarried and 2.1 per cent are widows.

Educational Status

Awareness and attitude of rural dalit women depend upon the extent of education. It enables the dalit women to acquire knowledge for improving and empowering their tasks in all fields. Hence, the educational status of the sample respondents was studied. It was brought to light that out of the 240 respondents surveyed, 145 (60.4 per cent) of them were literate. In contrast, 95 (39.6 per cent) of them were illiterate respondents. It is a good indicator of empowerment of women.

Type of Family

Out of the 240 respondents surveyed, 173(72.1 per cent) and 67(27.9 per cent) respondents were attached to nuclear family and joint family systems.

Family Size

In developing countries like India bigger size of family is a potential threat to rural development. Particularly, rural poverty. Poverty leads to the problem of any social and economic issues. Hence, in this context, the empowerment of women highly depends upon the size of the family.

It is evident from the present study in respect of 32 respondents the size of family of them was below 2-4 members. To a total of 208 respondents, with a family size of 2-5 members.

Ownership of House

Out of the 240 respondents surveyed, 176, 47,3, and 14 of respondents possessed owned house, rented house, leased house, and govt. colony.

Nature of Dwelling house

Not only the ownership, but the nature of the dwelling house also indicator on the standard of living. The study revealed the percentage of concrete and thatched houses were 63.3 per cent and 22.9 per cent respectively.

Occupational Distribution

Since, the status of women empowerment is closely associated with the occupation, the occupational distribution of the respondents was consideration for the present study. it is depicted in the Table-1. Out of the 240 respondents surveyed, the share of 96(40. per cent) was agricultural in addition to domestic work. To a total of 96(33.3 per cent) Agricultural labourer respondents. With respect to 28 (11.7 per cent) Construction workers, remaining 36 (15 per cent).

Level of Income

It is learnt from the present study that the total of 240 households surveyed, they were in possession of an annual income being less than 15,000, Rs. 15,001-25,000, Rs.25,001-35,000, Rs. 25,001-35,000 and Rs. 45,001 and above. The share contribution to the total in question, 106, 88,35, 8, and 3 sample respondents respectively.

Level of Indebtedness

The position of indebtedness of sample respondents in the study villages. As follows; 127(52.9 per cent) are no debts. To a total of 57(23.8 per cent)20

respondents have been indebted up to Rs.10,000. In the case of 41 sample respondents (17.1 per cent) were found to have in the range of Rs. 10,001-15,000. There are only 6(2.5 per cent) respondents who are indebted in the range of Rs.15,001-25,000. In respect of 9 respondents constituting 1.7 per cent indebted the range of Rs.25,001-35,000. The sample respondents reported that they borrowed from local money lenders etc.,

Source of Drinking Water

Rural women have to spend a lot of their energy and time in fetching water. It has increased the misery and drudgery of the rural women. In order to overcome these problems, providing source of drinking water nearby households reduces risk of families. The study clearly indicate that the majority of the sample respondents 218(90.8 per cent) depended on public tap. Only 22 respondents depend on own tap.

Household Amenities

Possession of various households assets and their value tell us about the welfare of an individual and standard of living. The study clearly reveals the household assets of sample respondents include radio, TV./ mobile phone, fridge, washing machine etc., are as follow;TV/ mobile phone 226(94.2 per cent) gas 161(67.1 per cent) radio 158(65.8 per cent)fridge 42(17.5 per cent) washing machine 5(2.1 per cent).

Attitude about Girl Child among Sample Respondents

It is documented in Table-1 out of 240 respondents, 101(42.1 per cent) respondents stated To give protection. To 58(24.2 per cent) respondents who stated providing girl child education not equal to boy 's education. Discussion with the few respondents reveals that educating sons is an investment because the sons will be responsible for caring for aging parents. Also, daughters with higher levels of education will likely have higher dowry expenses as they will want a comparably educated husband. Roy and Niranjana,(2004)study evident that women in Tamil nadu have a more equitable attitude towards education girl children and higher propensity to use family planning methods as compared to women in Uttar Pradesh. A total of 45(18.8 per cent) respondents expressed the opinion that to face dowry problem. National Crime Record Board(NCRB) records that the 4.6 percentage dowry deaths. The 36(15.0 per cent) respondents who expressed the Feel like burden of family. It is understood that above analysis clearly showed that the rural folk was still not much aware about gender sensitisation.

Table -1
Attitude about Girl Child Among Sample Respondents

Sl.No.	Attitude	No of Sample Respondents
1.	Feel like burden of family	36(15.0)
2.	Providing girl child education not equal to boy 's education	58(24.2)
3.	To face dowry problem	45(18.8)
4.	To give protection	101(42.1)
Total		240(100)
Source: Primary Data Computed		
Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage outside the parentheses indicate the number of respondents		

Measuring Level of Empowerment

The purpose of the study is to assess whether dalit women achieve the social, economic and political empowerment. Hence, an attempt is made to analyse the extend of empowerment of sample respondents.

For analyzing the extend of dalit women empowerment, data were collected directly from 240 respondents. They were requested to give their opinion about different variables. The options given were (i) 'Yes' (ii) 'To some extent' and (iii) 'No'. At one extreme there is a strong degree of empowerment (yes) and at the other least degree (No) and between them lie the intermediate point ('to some extend') Response indicating 'Yes' was given the score 'two' 'to some extend' was given the score 'one' and 'No' was given the least score, ie., zero.

Individual scores were collected for different variables from 240 sample respondents. Then the total score was divided by 240. The average score for each variable was obtained. After getting the average score for each variable, the total was divided by the number of variables which obtained the level of empowerment.

Level of Economic Empowerment

The social and political power is based on economic strength. If women gain economic strength, they gain voice and freedom. Therefore, empowerment process should aim at providing an opportunity to women to participate in the development dialogue. Particularly, dalit women community. Therefore, an attempt is made to measure the level of economic empowerment obtained by sample respondents. For this purpose nine variables were identified and analysed. The result of analysis is given in Table-2. The table clearly shows that, among the ten variables, level of economic empowerment was more in the variable '**own source of income**' and less in the '**Wage discrimination in the work**'. The total average score for the entire variables was 11.04 and hence it can be concluded that the

economic empowerment of rural dalit women was very high comparative to social and political empowerment

Table - 2
Level of Economic Empowerment

Sl.No	Variables	Yes	To Some Extend	No	Total Weighted scores	Mean Scores
1	Own source of income	196	3	41	395	1.64
2	Freedom To Spend Earnings	135	46	59	316	1.31
3	Knowledge of banking Awareness	144	22	73	310	1.29
4	Freedom to decide mode of savings	161	24	55	346	1.44
5	Freedom To go Job	184	4	52	372	1.55
6	Wage discrimination in the work	92	31	117	215	0.89
7	Prepare monthly family budget	144	31	66	319	1.32
8	Own decision to buy economic assets	104	29	107	237	0.98
9	Confidence to start own enterprise	146	2	92	294	1.22
Total mean score						11.04

Source : Primary data Computed.

Note : Total Weighted scores = Score X Frequency of Variables:
Means Score = Total Weighted scores/240

Score Value : Yes = 2 To Some Extend = 1 No =0 Score/240;
Level of Empowerment = Total Means Score

Level of Social Empowerment

Any study about women empowerment is incomplete unless an analysis is made about how far they are socially empowered. Women living in rural areas are favoured to have less autonomy than urban women. Particularly, socially deprived sections. In this background, the level of social empowerment is very important. Therefore, the present study tries to attempt how to assess the level of social empowerment obtained by the sample respondents, Nine variables were selected

and analysed for the study. The result of the analysis was given in Table-3. Among the nine variables, the highest mean score(1.35) was earned by the variable ‘**ready to face any problem**’ and the lowest(0.39) by variable viz., knowledge of legal rights. The total average score for the entire variables was 7.38 and hence it can be concluded that the level of social empowerment of rural dalit women was moderate when compared to economic empowerment. The study made by Bina Agarwal in Kerala, women’s risk of physical violence from husband is dramatically less, if they own land or a house. The incidence of violence is 49 per cent among women without property, but 18 per cent among land owning women and 7 per cent of them own both land and house.

Table -3
Level of Social Empowerment

Sl.No	Variables	Yes	To Some Extent	No	Total Weighted scores	Mean Scores
1	Able to speak in social issues	108	9	123	225	0.93
2	Expression own opinion in a Gram panchayat.	63	35	142	161	0.67
3	Raise voice against injustice	70	41	129	181	0.75
4	Knowledge of legal rights	36	22	182	94	0.39
5	Lack of freedom to go outside	109	13	118	231	0.96
6	Allowed to take food along with other members.	88	19	133	195	0.81
7	Ready to face any problems and challenges.	156	14	70	326	1.35
8	Ill-treatment by society	65	9	166	139	0.57
9	Member of any women organisation	114	0	126	228	0.95
	Total mean score					7.38

Source : Primary data Computed

Note : Total Weighted scores = Score X Frequency of Variables:
 Means Score = Total Weighted scores/240

Score Value : Yes = 2 To Some Extend = 1 No =0 Score/240;
 Level of Empowerment = Total Means Score

Level of Political Empowerment

Political empowerment is the power of women in the participation of democracy. In order to assess how far sample respondents participate in the field of politics and thereby empower themselves, seven variables were chosen for the study. Table-4 depicts that among the seven variables, more involve in the 'to voting the public election' and less in the 'dependents on the dominant politician'. The total average score for the seven variables was 4.95 and hence it can be concluded that the level of political empowerment of rural dalit women was very low comparative to economic and social empowerment. It is reason to the Restriction on money and muscle, lack of control over resources and lack of exposure were inhibits to joining politics.

Table-4
Level of Political Empowerment

Variables	Yes	To Some Extend	No	Total Weighted scores	Mean Scores
Due to lack of exposure	111	3	126	225	0.93
Dependents on the dominant politician	18	4	218	40	0.16
Membership in political party	34	7	199	75	0.31
Participation local governance	50	3	187	103	0.42
Utility opportunity to contest elections	79	0	161	158	0.65
Support to family members political party	70	3	167	143	0.59
Voting the public election	227	0	13	454	1.89
Total mean score					4.95

Note : Total Weighted scores = Score X Frequency of Variables:
 Means Score = Total Weighted scores/240

Score Value :Yes = 2 To Some Extend = 1 No =0 Score/240;
Level of Empowerment = Total Means Score

Testing of Hypotheses

The relationship between the level of empowerment and key socio-economic factors like age, type of family, education, family size, ownership of house, nature of dwelling house, occupation, annual income, and indebtedness of the respondents was analysed by chi-square test. The Null hypothesis is framed as: H_0 : There is no strong relationship between the level of empowerment and socio-economic status of sample respondents. The computed results have been summarized in Table-5. It is inferred from the table that the calculated chi-square values of socio-economic status of the respondents have been found to be greater than the table value. Thus, it has been significant at 5 per cent level. Hence, there exists a relationship between socio-economic factors and level of empowerment of dalit women.

Table-5
Relationship between the Level of Empowerment and
Socio- economic Status of Rural Dalit women

Socio-economic Variables	Calculated value	Degrees of freedom	Table value at 5 per cent level	Level of Significant
Age	123.5	4	9.49	Significant
Type of family	129.06	1	3.84	Significant
Education	10.41	1	3.84	Significant
Family size	129.06	1	3.84	Significant
Ownership of house	455.08	4	9.49	Significant
Nature of dwelling house	208.23	3	7.81	Significant
Occupation	54.93	3	7.81	Significant
Annual income	182.45	4	9.49	Significant
Level of indebtedness	376.11	6	12.59	Significant

Source : Value calculated from Primary Data

Table- 6
Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F Value	P Value .
Regression	5.323	1	5.323	4.307	.039
Residual	294.173	238	1.236		
Total	299.496	239			
Source : Value calculated from Primary Data					

Table-7
Correlation Relationship Between the Key Socio-Economic Variables and Attitude about girl child

Variables	Attitude of girl child	Education	Family Size	Occupation	Annual Income
Attitude about girl child	1.000				
Education	.878	1.000			
Family Size	.883	.926	1.000		
Occupation	.838	.851	.854	1.000	
Annual income	.842	.882	.850	.853	1.000

*All correlations are significant at 0.01 per cent level(one-tailed)

Table-3 To explore the relationship between the key socio-economic factors of the Attitude of girl child among the dalit women sample respondents. Pearson correlation co-efficient was computed, the results indicated that all the variables were significantly correlated at 0.01 per cent level. Further the strength of the relationship between family size

Table-8
Regression Analysis of Key Socio-economic Variables and Attitude of Girl Child

Variables	R value	R Square Value	Adjusted R Square Value	Std. Error	F Value	P Value
Education(X1)	0.883	0.779	0.778	1.45510	842.092	0.000*
Family Size(X2)	0.899	0.809	0.807	1.35567	503.742	0.000*
Occupational (X3)	0.904	0.817	0.815	1.32785	353.741	0.000*
Annual income(X4)	0.908	0.824	0.821	1.30806	275.448	0.000*
Durbin-Watson:1.664						
Significant at * p< 0.05 per cent						

Attitude about girl child($r = 0.883, p < 0.05$) education with attitude of girl child($r = 0.878, p < 0.05$) Annual income with attitude of girl child($r = 0.838, p < 0.05$) and occupation with attitude of girl child($r = 0.848, p < 0.05$). It implies that the family size of the dalit women sample respondents plays a significant role in the attitude of girl child.

In order to assess the contribution of independent variables like education, family size, occupation and annual income as the dependent variable to attitude of girl child, the step wise multiple regression analysis was carried out. The results are presented in Table-4. It has been revealed from table that four variables were entered into the equation and the order of inclusion has been as follows: education(X1), family size(X2), occupation(X3) and annual income(X4). The multiple R and R² increased. This indicates that the education, (X1) family size (X2), occupational (X3) and annual income (X4) were the best set of predictors of attitude of girl child among sample respondents having the combined contribution about 91 per cent. Education accounted for 77 per cent of the variance, family size accounted for 80 per cent of the variance, occupation accounted for 81 per cent of the variance and annual income accounted for 82 per cent of the variance. F value 4.307 ($p < 0.05$)

Table-9

Regression Analysis of Socio-economic Variables and Attitude About Girl Child

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t Value	P Value	Colinearity statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.304	0.079	-	29.019	0.000*	1.000	1.000
Education(X1)	0.246	0.201	0.368	4.782	0.000*	.126	7.910
Family size(X2)	0.960	0.098	0.165	2.579	0.011*	.183	5.457
Occupation(X3)	0.246	0.081	0.181	3.036	0.003*	.210	4.760
Annual income,X4)	0.252	0.153	0.238	2.868	0.005*	.109	9.194

Significant at* p< 0.05 per cent

From the regression analysis, derive the following regression model equation.

Attitude about Girl Child = $\alpha + x_1$ Education+ x_2 Family size+ x_3 Occupation + x_4 Annual income

ID=2.304+0.246X₁+0.960X₂+0.246X₃+0.252X₄

From the model it is identified family size is highly influenced and it predict attitude about girl child than other variable viz., Education, occupation and annual income. The colinerity statistics revealed the presence of variance influence factor and total score is P> 0.5and 0.002 whereas means lack of multiliner evasion. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

II.CONCLUSION

The socio-economic empowerment of rural dalit women could be kept as a long term development goal in India. Economic, social and political empowerment of rural dalit women will go a long way in attaining self-reliance for women. The success achieved in this regard is helpful to bring dalit women into the mainstream of inclusive growth process in India. The study reveals a clear picture of socio-economic status of rural dalit women quite satisfactory. The study provides evidence that key socio-economic variables are the highly significant to the level of empowerment. As per the study, the results indicated that family size is the strongest predictor of attitude of girl child followed by education, occupation and annual income. A noteworthy conclusion of the study is that the level of economic empowerment is better than social and political empowerment.

Policy Implications

- To provide the skills training programme
- Capacity building programme on legal and human rights education through rural development agency and NGO's
- To create awareness with regard to gender-sensitive.
- Elimination of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her rights within and outside the family.
- The media will be used to portray images consistent with human dignity of rural dalit women.

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