

WOMEN

EMPOWERMENT



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INTRODUCTION

It is fairly well established today that the 'transformed socio-political and economic life', 'improved life conditions' of women, and society's 'progressive mindset' towards them, or more precisely, 'empowered women' is one of the significant indicators of national progress. In fact, nation's march towards 'development', 'progress', modernity etc. largely depends upon how far it is serious and realistic about the issues, challenges and predicaments of women community, and how far it is capable of pausing atrocities and exploitations against them. Therefore, the nations which were hitherto ignorant of women issues are now contemplating over them by outlining strategies and designing and approving schemes and plans for their advancement. They seem to have arrived to a conclusion that democracy and civilization would be paralyzed if patriarchal attitude continues to work with its prejudiced mindset towards women folk. Moreover, the nations which are pondering over inclusive growth, have recognised the importance of addressing women related issues in their domestic policies, and attempted to bring them to the centre-stage.

Although, attempts to understand the importance and seriousness of women issues and the necessity of ameliorating their life conditions is as old as human history, it is only recently that the nations are labouring at and engaging in working out and resolving such issues. More particularly, the establishment of the United Nations Organisation has given the greater push to the strivings of bringing women to the

mainstream national life. With a view to transforming women's life by designing lasting solutions for their plights, the UN has enacted a series of laws, schemes, programmes and conventions, and held world-wide agitations and awareness programmes. It is argued that no developmental scheme, whether poverty alleviation or disease prevention, or which aimed to achieve sustainable growth, would yield envisioned results unless it treats and accepts all unbiasedly and impartially, particularly the women community. Kofi Annan has rightly pointed out in his message on International Women's Day in 2002 that, "we are resolved to work for gender equality and the empowerment of women as vital tools to combat poverty and disease, and to achieve development that is truly sustainable; equally, we are determined to build on the contribution of women in managing conflict and building peace and building good governance".¹ As part of such endeavour by the UNO, now "women all over the world have launched powerful movements to reverse centuries of discrimination and injustice, are mobilizing against violence and oppression, are demanding equal rights, greater opportunities for development, equitable rights and control over their earnings and bodies".²

The world community today has come to regard matters related to women as world issues and their predicaments as global problems. This is indicated by the series of developmental policies formulated at the national and international spheres. In the last two decades, almost all the national and global schemes of development, overtly or covertly, have directed themselves to address and dialogue with the exploitations, challenges and atrocities that the women are routinely encountering. Realizing the urgency of eliminating the incidents of women abuses in social affairs and unfair policies, the World Bank has urged the governments across the world to make the subject of women empowerment the central objective of social development schemes in its recent reports.³ The government of India too has accepted and endorsed several national and international agreements and conventions, which are aimed to materialising the

¹Kofi Annan, United Nations Statements and Messages, Message on International Women's Day, 27 February 2002, Press Release.

²Vishal Shrivastava, "Analysis of National Policy for Women Empowerment, 2001: Legal Changes and their Implementation", Human Rights International Research Journal, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2014, p. 150.

³World Bank, "Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights", Resource and Voice, New York, 2001, pp. 152-7.

demand for equal rights and opportunities for women, and annihilating all forms of abuses and cruelties against them. With an explicit intention of establishing a fair, egalitarian and judicious society, the government of India has enacted ‘The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women’ in 2001. Its goal has been stipulated as, “to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women” by providing them equal opportunities and treatment with men in the fields of economy, society, culture, freedom, human rights and decision makings.⁴

“The empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women”,⁵ and this agenda has been carried out either by the international community/organisations, or the national governments or by the NGOs. In India, the grass root level bodies/NGOs such as women organisations, are fulfilling significant responsibilities in the process of strengthening women’s position and in reviving their social status. This was also acknowledged by the government of India, and while designing the national policy for women it emphatically stated “the women’s movement and a wide-spread network of non-government organisations which have strong presence at the grass-roots and deep insight into women’s concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women”.⁶

Theoretically, the role of the government initiatives and the contributions of the NGOs in achieving the goal of women empowerment have been recognised by a large number of research works and literary sources.⁷

⁴The draft, The National Policy for the Empowerment of women 2001 (NPEW). The policy can be seen, more or less, as reproduction of different global conventions on women and women empowerment, particularly, the world Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1993.

⁵Introduction, 2nd para-NPEW 2001.

⁶Introduction, 6th para-NPEW 2001.

⁷An abundant of literature is available today on the role of women organisations in women empowerment. Particularly in the last two decades, a large number of researchers and academicians from across the globe have worked extensively on the various aspects of women empowerment. However, there is hardly any work directly dealing with the role of women organisations in women empowerment in the DK District. In India such studies became prominent after the International Women’s Year in 1975 following extensive analysis of the report of the committee on the status of women in India, “Towards Equality”, in 1947. A few exemplary works: Patrick Kilby’s work, NGOs in India: The Challenges of Women Empowerment and Accountability, Routledge: Contemporary South Asia Series, Taylor & Francis, 2010; Marilee Karl,

Women and Empowerment, Participation and Decision Making, London: Zed Books, 1995; J.B. Pillai, Women and Empowerment, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995; R.C. Mishra, Towards Gender Equality, New Delhi: Authors Press, 2006; Kanchan Mathur, Countering Gender Violence, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004; Eve Buzwa, Responding to Domestic Violence, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012; Neera Desai, Emergence and Development of Women's Organisations in India, Ahmedabad: Allied Publishers, 1989; K. B. Pradhan, Women in Indian Freedom Movement, New Delhi: Arise Publications, 2012; Aparna Basu, Role of Women in Indian Struggle for Freedom, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1976; R.K. Tandon, Status of Women in Contemporary World, Mumbai: Neha Publishers & Distributors, 2011; Gayathri N, Karnatakada Mahila Chaluvali Abhivridhdi patha: Suvarna Karnataka, Bangalore: Chetana Books, 2006; S.R.P. Sinha, Women's Right: Myth and Reality, Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1990; Vijay Agnew, Elite Women in Indian Politics, New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House, 1979; Aruna Asaf Ali, The Resurgence of Indian Women, New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1991; Mridula Bhadauria, Women in India: Some Issues, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1977; M.R. Biju, Women Empowerment, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006; Pratima Asthana, Women Movement in India, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992; Tara Ali Baig, Women in India, New Delhi: Publications Division, 1958; Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, Women and Political Participation in India, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2000; Yashodha Bhat (ed), Threshold: Indian Women on the Move, Delhi: B.R. Publisher, 1995; Renuka Rai, Role and Status of Women in India, Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd, 1970; Kiran Saxena, Women and Politics, New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 2000; C.K. Jain, Women Parliamentarians in India, Delhi: Surjeet Publication, 1993; M. N. Srinivas, The Changing Position of Indian Women, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978; Flavia Agnes, 'Women's Movement in a Secular Framework: Redefining the Agendas' in Mary E. John ed. Women's Studies in India, New Delhi: Penguin, 2008; Mala Khullar, Writing the Women's Movement, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005; Elisabeth Armstrong, Gender and Neoliberalism: The All India Democratic Women's Association and Globalisation Politics, New Delhi: Tulika, 2013; Anne Marie Goetz, Governing Women: Women's Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform, New York: Routledge, 2009; Amrita Basu, Two Faces of Protest Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993; Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar, Women's Studies in India: Contours of Change, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advance Studies, 2002; Leslie J Colman, Towards Empowerment: Women and Movement Politics in India, Boulder: Westview, 1992; Manjeet Bhatia, Deepali Bhanot and Nirmalaya Samanta, Gender Concerns in South Asia: Some Perspectives, Jaipur: Rawat, 2008 etc. In addition, number of research articles, chapters, conference proceedings, national and international reports, UNOs study reports and study materials of women associations have been produced on the subjects of women organisations, women rights, justice, historical and present status of women, gender disparities, crimes and violent activities against women, women empowerment schemes and their hurdles etc.

These have highlighted and analysed various schemes and programmes delineated at various levels both by the government and non-governmental organisations, particularly by women organisations. Further, they have suggested the possible changes and improvements, which also inspired further for the accomplishment of the task of women empowerment.

This work is primarily an exploration into the working and contributions of women organisations in raising the life conditions of women in the DK district of Karnataka. It also probes into the issues such as their ideological affiliations, their constitutional-legal awareness, concern for domestic violence, interest in resolving and responding anti-women incidents, awareness programmes, funding, interest in giving the victims legal and other aids etc. Although, immense writings have cropped up across the globe and in India in recent years, highlighting the different dimensions of the working of women organisations, no exclusive or substantial work has been produced, dealing primarily with the working of the women organisations and their role in women empowerment in DK district. This attempt has its own significance as DK district is one of the centres of rigorous women activities, where atrocities and anti-women crimes are also frequent occurrence. Moreover, DK district is the hub of women organisations with 3985 registered bodies, located in urban and rural areas of the district.⁸ Similarly, the district is known for the presence of a variety of women organisations; some are allied to political parties and working as their wings, some are politically neutral, some genuinely work for women welfare and empowerment, and many use organisations as profit-making, money generating and men-threatening centres.

We do not claim here that the work is complete in all of its dimensions and respects. We do not also cling to the belief that women empowerment or whatever transformation occurred in the life conditions of women in the DK district over the years is the exclusive labour of the women organisations. Our intension here is to probe into the contributions, big or small, formal or informal, of the women organisations in improving and strengthening the status of women in the district, besides their context and style of working. Given the bulkiness of the women organisations, the number of atrocious cruelties and horrifying incidents happening against women, and the complexities of the social and caste structure in

⁸The NGO forum list of Dakshina Kannada District 2017, and Dakshina Kannada District Mahila mandala list 2017.

the district, this work has not been easy. However, we carried out this venture by observing and analysing their operations and achievements in-person, collecting information from historical and contemporary sources including interviews, and understanding the various schemes of the government meant for achieving women welfare and also considering the responses of the organisations.

Government Efforts

Over the years the government of India, and many other non-governmental organisations, particularly women, have formulated a number of schemes and programmes for accomplishing the objectives of women empowerment. These were basically aimed to realize gender equality, equal opportunities and gender justice and to pause discriminations, crimes and atrocities committed against women. Despite these efforts, the studies have shown that there is no significant change in the life-conditions of women in India. The government of India explicitly stated the situation thus: “however, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analysed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, ‘Towards Equality’, 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988–2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the Platform for Action, Five Years After- An assessment. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country”.⁹

The government of Karnataka has also initiated several women empowerment schemes, plans and projects. These were aimed to achieve two things: on the positive side, protecting the rights, liberties and the dignity of women, giving them greater opportunities along with their safety, and promising them higher social and economic status; on the negative side, they were aimed to prevent crimes against women by demolishing patriarchal social structure. The DK district has always

⁹ Introduction, 7 and 8th para-NPEW, 2001.

shown greater interest in implementing the schemes and programmes of women empowerment.

DK District: Geographical Features

Dakshina Kannada is one of the districts in Karnataka State. Surrounded by the western ghats on the East and Arabian Sea on the West, Dakshina Kannada receives heavy rainfall during the monsoon. It is bordered by Udupi district in the North, Chikkamagalur in the North-east, Hasan district in the East, Coorg in the South-east and Kasaragod district in Kerala in the South. According to the 2011 government census, Dakshina Kannada district has a population of 2,083,625.¹⁰ The district of Dakshina Kannada consists of six taluks such as, Mangalore, Bantwal, Belthangady, Moodabidri, Puttur and Sullia.

The region is distinguishable from other parts of Karnataka in terms of its high trajectory of industrialization and commercial advancement. The harbour and the airport at Mangalore, the konkan railway and the national highways have connected the place with other parts of the country and the larger world. In the field of education, the region has perhaps achieved a landmark, as there are a large number of professional and non-professional colleges as well as other primary and secondary educational institutions. Banking and the hotel industries are the two most important enterprises in which the region has achieved considerable success. In spite of DK district's rapid growth as commercial capital, agriculture continues to be one of the predominant occupations. Paddy, arecanut, coconut, cashew and rubber are the main crops besides a number of commercial and non-commercial crops.

In addition, fishing has been a major occupation in the region. One of the striking features of the agrarian and non-agrarian sectors in DK is the presence of a huge migrant population of the labour class from across the country, exerting significant impact on the economy. In recent years, the region has seen an enormous growth in industrial sector, resulted by the creation of Mangalore Special Economic Zone (MSEZ). Commentators have aptly described these developments as unprecedented. Further, the district is also negatively known for the incidents of communal violence, caste protests, women-related

¹⁰We have collected primary data regarding the population, sex ratio, literacy rate etc from the District Office, DK district, Karnataka State.

incidents and ecological agitations. In the last two decades DK district has grown tremendously in all respects and spheres.¹¹

Further, the coastal stripe of Dakshina Kannada is historically known to the mainland Karnataka as a 'window to the west', a 'gate way for coastal and overseas trade'. All the power centres sought to possess or control the district and even the British grabbed it at the first opportunity. The British, in consonance with their colonial policy, saw the region as essentially suitable for agriculture and commerce and were reluctant to develop it industrially. But in the post-independent period the economic equations in the region have changed. Compare to other economic pursuits and undertakings, agriculture has not registered much success in the region notwithstanding the intervention of the land reforms and dismantling of the feudal framework. Rice cultivation is admittedly unviable except for sentimental reasons. Dakshina Kannada as a distinct culture-zone has always show-cased its cultural wares. The most advertised of them are Bhuta-kola, Kambala, Yakshagana and its non-theatrical, purely loquacious version, Tala-Maddale. The worship of myriad Bhutas or Daivas has long been a part of religious-cultural life of Dakshina Kannada. The district is also called Tulunadu- an area where residents speak one of the vernacular languages- Tulu.¹²

Sex Ratio

The sex ratio of Dakshina Kannada district and Karnataka is shown as below.¹³

Table 1

Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
DK	1048	1027	1006	1015	1020	1022	1018
Karnataka	966	959	957	963	960	965	968
India	946	941	930	934	927	933	940

¹¹Rajaram Tolpady "Changing Context of Civil Society in India Perspectives on Democracy and Secularism", in Dakshina Kannada after 1947, National Seminar Proceedings, Feb 14–15, 2014, St. Aloysius College, pp. 132–33.

¹²Professor Surendra Rao B, Dakshina Kannada after 1947, National Seminar Proceedings, Feb 14–15, 2014, St. Aloysius College, pp. 5–11.

¹³National Population Census Data, 2011 Karnataka and India. Information collected from the district office.

The above table shows that there were 1048 females per 1000 males in 1951 in the district of DK soon after India got independence. The sex ratio of Karnataka today shows increase as compared to 1951. There was a continuous decline of sex ratio of India from 1951, but over a period past two decades there is a positive sign of increase from 927 to 940. It is clear from this that though the district continues to have higher presence of females even in 2011, the demographic trend favouring female is, however, changing in the negative way.

According to the 2011 census, Dakshina Kannada has a population of 2,089,649. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001–2011 was 9.8%. Dakshina Kannada has a sex ratio of 1018 females for every 1000 males, and literacy rate of 88.62%. The literacy rate of Mangalore city is 94%. According to the 2011 census, the district ranks second in per capita income, second in HDI, first in literacy and third in sex ratio among all districts in Karnataka.

DK District: 2011 Census¹⁴

Table 2

Areas	2001	2011
Area Sq. Km	4,861	4,861
Population	18.98 Lakhs	20.90 Lakhs
Actual Population	1,897,730	2,089,649
Male Population	938,434	1,034,714
Female Population	959,296	1,054,935
Total Child Population	228,060	208,297
Male Child Population	116,854	106,985
Female Child Population	111,206	101,312
Child Proportion	12.02%	9.97%
Boys Proportion	12.45%	10.34%
Girls Proportion	11.59%	9.60%

¹⁴Data and information collected from the district office. The data chart has also been published in various governmental websites.

Women Empowerment

Sex Ratio (Per 1000)	1022	1020
Literacy Rate	83.35%	88.57%
Total Literates	1,391,738	1,666,323
Male Literates	736,962	864,019
Female Literates	654,776	802,304
Male Literacy	89.70%	93.13%
Female Literacy	77.21%	84.13%
Child Sex Ratio	952	947
Population Growth	14.59%	10.11%
Proportion to Karnataka Population	3.59%	3.42%

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