CHAPTER VI

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The concept of empowerment has become one of the widely used development terms. Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full potential and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted nor can it be given as alms. Power has to be acquired and once it is acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved\(^1\).

Of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. Women work two-thirds of the world's working, according to the United Nations. Women earn only 10 percent of the World's income. Women own less than one percent of the world's property\(^2\). In order to make women pillars of the society, better citizens of the world steps should be taken by the

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social activists to better their positions. There are specific sources for the disempowerment of women.

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- No asset base-No access to land, capital, skill – Dominance of money lenders
- Inadequate access to bank credit – marketing problem – Low price for products – distress sale
- corruption
diversion of labour – gender discrimination of wages – patrilineal inheritance – Male dominated polices – gender exploitation – Limited bargaining power – Lack of control over income – Fall victim to intermediaries and are cheated.
The aforesaid details bring down the position of women to a second rate and they are deprived of their rights\(^3\). Nowhere in the history of humanity men and women were treated alike and assigned statuses alike. Women have not been able to lead a life exactly on par with men in spite of their urge for equality. But women in ancient India enjoyed a position which was on the whole much more satisfactory than in the later periods. Women underwent almost a kind of servitude during the medieval period and their position went on improving during the British period and after independence. Today Indian women are almost assigned an equal status with men. All their political, educational and other disabilities have been removed legally\(^4\).

Though steps have been taken by the Government for the improvement of women yet in many places in Tirunelveli their position seems to be very bleak. Hence the Non-Governmental Organisations which have been functioning in Tirunelveli District

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\(^3\) N.Lalitha, B.S.Nagarajan, 'Social Help Groups in Rural Development', 2002, New Delhi, P.199.

\(^4\) C.N.Shankar Rao, 'Sociology', 2011, New Delhi, P.834.
have come forward to ameliorate the depressed state of affairs of the women folk in Tirunelveli District.

The foremost step taken by the Non-Governmental Organisations in Tirunelveli is the formation of Self-Help Groups. Through Self Help Groups women in Tirunelveli area are highly benefitted. The Self Help Groups have laid the seeds for economic and social empowerment of women. Women members are motivated to form into groups. 2500 women Self Help Groups are formed so far by the SCAD Non-Governmental Organisation alone. 50000 members are enrolled in these groups. The total internal saving of these groups has gone upto 114.9 million rupees. The group members themselves have internal money lending. The internal money lending has come upto 136.8 million. A sum of 111.8 million rupees is organized from the bank to take up income generation activities. More them 5,000 women have started small income generation programme initiatives like saree weaving, mat weaving, pottery, paper cup manufacture, shoes and sandals

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5 N.Lalitha, B.S.Nagarajan, op.cit, P.200.
making, small shops, service agencies like public Telephone Booth, cycle lending shops. At the instigation of the SCAD Non-Voluntary Organisation the Self Help Groups in Tirunelveli have organized a Bank, known as "Surabhi" to promote income generating programmes. Nearly 10 million rupees is available as a revolving fund. More than 10000 women are members of this 'Surabhi Bank'.

Insurance Cover for Self Help Groups members is a major factor that reduces vulnerability of poor families to meet out the critical solution such as the death of the bread winner and accidents. Arumbugal Trust the Non-Governmental Organisation in Tirunelveli has introduced a life insurance policy called 'Jeevan Mathur' to the Self Help Group members who volunteered were selected and training was imparted to them by Life Insurance Corporation Officials in which Self Help Group Members have been raised themselves as Life Insurance Corporation agents. By this sensitization and motivation clients have joined this scheme.

The minimum amounts were collected by the agents and submitted regularly to the Life Insurance Corporation through Arumbugal Trust.

Women's empowerment is based on the material gain. Material gain enables women to secure economic gain on an ongoing and sustained basis\textsuperscript{7}. Once economic empowerment is achieved in terms of availability of credit facilities with dignity, better bargaining power, more income, basic necessities of life in terms of food, clothing and housing, it has major implications in other forms of overall empowerment including social and political aspects. Participation in group activities leads to changed self-image, enhanced access to new information and skills broad knowledge about resource availability organizational and collective action, negotiation with government staff and development of network with other institutions. Leadership qualities and active participation in group culture lead to improvement in political

\textsuperscript{7} N.Lalitha, B.S.Nagarajan, op.cit, P.204.
acumen which would in turn strengthen and sustain the overall process of empowerment.

The Non-Governmental Organisations promote group organisation among women. The NGOs train women for the maintenance of account and play a leading role in identifying opportunities for economic improvement\(^8\). This practice has been carried out by the Vaan Muhil NGO in Tirunelveli District especially in Seranmaha Devi area. Nearly 90% of the members of the selected groups have repaid the loan within the stipulated period which acts as an important factor in expanding the revolving fund.

The constructive activities successfully carried out by the women has resulted in the change of attitude among men. Men who treated women with contempt and underestimated the capacity of women are now found to be supportive and they contribute a lot for the regular attendance of women for the group meetings.\(^9\) Owing to the dynamic functioning of the Self Help groups in the

\(^{8}\) N.Lalitha and B.S. Nagarajan, op.cit, P. 205.  
\(^{9}\) Ibid, P.207.
villages in Tirunelveli more and more Self Help Groups are being organized by the Arumbugal Trust and Vidyarambam Trusts in Tirunelveli District. Healthy competitions among the Self Help Groups in the same village or in the neighbouring villages has led to better performance\(^{10}\) of the group members like increase in savings contribution, improved recovery, formation of business groups among women. Linkage with government programmes has widened the capital base of the group members enabling them to understand income generating programmes on a wider scale. In due course women of the Self Help Groups have over years gained the organizing skill and campaigning capacity. Women organize village meetings. They make repeated visits to panchayat union offices along with members of Self Help Groups demanding various amenities which have contributed to the collective strength of the groups\(^{11}\). Thus the groups pressurize the existing system with a view to making them accountable to people. This has helped the Self Help Groups members in availing of certain benefits like

\(^{10}\) N.Lalitha and B.S. Nagarajan, op.cit, P.207.

street lights, roads, hand pump and electric connection to houses.
The Municipality of Tirunelveli and the panchayats of the surrounding villages have been pressurized by the Self Help Groups to make the needed amenities to the people. The Self Help Groups have even gone to the extents of identifying the exploitation of women by men and take up the issue as a common problem against the wrong doers\textsuperscript{12}.

The Self Help Groups movement has grown from strength to strength over the years bringing about substantial social change among women generally in Tamil Nadu and particularly in Tirunelveli District. The Tamil Nadu Corporation for development of women has also begun to give importance to the Self Help Groups\textsuperscript{13}. It has become the endeavour of the corporation of Tirunelveli to extend the benefits of the Self Help groups approach to the uncovered areas and uncovered sections of the society. The immediate goal of the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of

\textsuperscript{12} Pillai, J.K., op.cit, P.13. 
\textsuperscript{13} Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, Project Implementation Unit, Mahalir Thittam, collectorate Campus, Tirunveli, 2011, P.3.
women is to ensure that all poor women particularly widows, destitutes, disabled persons, transgender and marginalized are included in the Self Help Groups in the next three years.

Mahalir Thittam Project\textsuperscript{14} (plan for women) is being implemented in all rural areas, in 257 village panchayats of 14 Blocks of Tirunevelly District through the Block Development offices where as "Vazhuthukattuvoom" (Exhibit others our lives) project is being implemented in the rest of the 5 Blocks in urban areas. It is being implemented through Extension Officers of Town panchayats, Assistant Commissioners in Municipalities and Commissioner in Tirunelveli Corporation\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{14} Tamil Nadu Coporation for Development of Women, op.cit, P.3.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, P.3.
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Mahalir Thittam

The first and foremost object of Mahalir Thittam is to form and cover all poor women under the age group of 18 to 65 in the form of Self Help groups. The formation of the Mahalir Thittam was established in 1998. So far 21023 Self Help groups have been formed and 327796 women have been enrolled. It includes 81211 scheduled castes and scheduled tribe women also. Special initiative has been taken to form special groups which includes differently abled, HIV and AIDS affected and Transgenders. So far 30 Differently abled, 9 HIV and AIDS affected and 3 Transgender groups have been formed. To reduce unemployment problem, youth skill training was imparted under various trades through reputed institutions and job placements are also ensured to them. The Self Help group members are also given income based training such as bakery, tailoring, fashion, jewelry making, jute product training, and beautification training.

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16 Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of women, op.cit, P.4.
17 Ibid, P.5.
Under Mahalir Thittam a federation of Self Help Groups is formed at the village Panchayats level called panchayat level Federation comprising two representatives from each Self Help group in the Panchayat. The Panchayat level federation provides a common platform for the Self Help Groups to share their experiences need to voice their grievances. The Panchayat Level Federation can help to achieve what individual Self Help Groups cannot, by pooling in talent and resources and exploiting economics of scale both in production and marketing.\(^{18}\)

**Vazhndhu Kaattuvoom**

Gender discrimination and atrocities against women have been an ugly face of the society. Patriarchy has brought with it inequality, discrimination, and deprivation on women. Women have also accepted subordination as part of the social ethos. Men and women are increasingly becoming aware that several of the basic rights of women are violated and surrendered in the process of discrimination, inequality and deprivation. Discrimination against

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\(^{18}\) Tamil Nadu Corporation For Development of Women, op.cit, P.9.
women persists and exists in her denial of right to education, denial of nutritious food, medical care, dowry related problems and sexual harassment.

To ameliorate the sufferings of women and to upgrade their status the Government has passed.

1. Special Marriages Act in 1954 which insisted that a girl is fit to be married should have attained the age of 18.

2. Dowry was prohibited by the Act in 1961

3. Child marriage was prevented by the Act of 1976

4. The Act of 1956 provided rights for women to entitle for property rights.

These legislations have highly enhanced\(^\text{19}\) the status of women. Along with these the Non-Governmental Organisations in Tirunelveli such as SCAD, Vaan Muhil, Arumbugal, Puratchi and Vidyarambam have also through the formation of Self Help Groups have rejuvenated the lives of the poor destitute women who in due

\[^{19}\text{Nadeem Hasnain, 'Indian Society and Culture' New Delhi, 2006, P.479.}\]
course developed a self will that they can also challenge the society and to have a better life through the leadership training provided to them by these aforesaid Non-Governmental Organisations.

In addition to them the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women in Tirunelveli has created five urban blocks in the urban areas to train women for better prospects. The assistance given by the Non-Governmental Organisations, the support of the Government Organisations and the Government legislaltions have made the women folk of Tirunelveli to have a self determination which has made them to stand on their own legs under the caption "Vazhnthu Kattuvoom". The empowerment of women has thus been enthroned as a consequence of the firm determination of women to challenge the social discrimination against them.

Child Development

To day's children are tommorrow's backbone of the Indian families. But they are discriminated socially, psychologically,
economically and in violation of law. The discrimination is found in the rural as well as in the urban areas. When the children require love, affection, protection, education and good health facilities then they are deprived of them impacts. Children are sent or compelled to work for economic and other reasons. There begins the abuse of child labour.\textsuperscript{20}

Child labour continues to be a problem of enormous dimensions. Deprivations are common for child labour. These are the children, who are deprived of physical, intellectual, social, psychological and educational growth and development. In spite these harsh realities child labour persists because of multiple reasons. Child labour is no doubt cheap but it implies violation of children's rights. Child labour is the product of poverty and underdevelopment.\textsuperscript{21}

The issue of problems associated with children are caused by many reasons. Children are neglected by their parents. Many


\textsuperscript{21} M.N. Parmar and Jagadish Solanki, op.cit, P.89.
children are performing in accordance with their families. After repeated steps taken by the parents to improve the behavior of their children, the children do not pay heed to such suggestions of their parents. Most of the parents neglect such children. When once they are neglected by their parents they come to the streets and become street children. Many women are also neglected either by their husbands or by their parents. Thus the children and women when dispossessed are being possessed by the law breakers of the soil and the children are employed and they become bonded labourers.

In order to ameliorate the sufferings of the poor children many Non Governmental Organisations have come forward either to educate such children or try to get suitable jobs. One such Non-Governmental Organisation which tries to rejuvenate the life of the children is Puratchi (Trust). Having been founded in 2003, the Puratchi Trust has begun its first phase of activities to minimize school drop out children in the Tirunelveli District. Puratchi Trust has done door step surveys on children who drop out of school and
work as bonded labourers in villages. These dropout children are specially guarded, given sufficient advice and are taken again to schools at the cost of the Puratchi Trust\textsuperscript{22}.

Likewise, another Non-Governmental Organisation also does yeomen service for the development of children's lives. This organization started in 1985 at Cheramahadevi in Tirunelveli District has established 185 balwadis (day care centres) These day care centres prepare children for future learning, the balwadi centres provide health and nutritional checks to all children\textsuperscript{23}. Vidyarambam, another Non-Governmental Organisation has provided quality education to over 6,00,000 rural primary school children over a period of 9 years from 2002 to 2011\textsuperscript{24}. Vidyarambum Trust is dedicated in providing enjoyable quality education to all under privileged pre-primary children.

Yet another Non-Governmental Organisation which devotes its full energy is 'Saranalayam Non-Governmental Organisation.

\textsuperscript{22} Puratchi Annual Report 2011-2012, Tirunelveli, P.4.
\textsuperscript{24} Vidyarambum Trust, Publication Tirunelveli 2012, P.7.
This Trust as initiated in 1993 in Tirunelveli with the intention of rescuing children found in the streets and place them with in the Saranalayam campus in Tirunelveli. A shelter home is also earmarked for them. The Saranalayam Trust ensures basic rights for survival, protection, development and participation of the children in all respects. This Trust collects information about missing children. Babies born of illicit relationship are abandoned and such children are taken care of by this Trust. These children are rescued, cared and reared by the Saranalayam Trust. The Saranalayam Trust runs Rehabilitation home for children in distress and gives them counselling. If possible the Trust reunites them with their families. If not possible such children are placed in schools. Many children are trained in technical skill and employment opportunities are provided.

Since infant mortality is extremely high, the Peace Trust Non-Governmental Organisation in Tirunelveli takes up the priority of imparting knowledge to mothers in taking care of the infants.

26 Ibid, P.3.
The first priority in promoting effective child development is to ensure that children survive the early years when they are most vulnerable to disease and malnutrition. That means educating the mother or primary caregiver, before and after child is born, about providing critical care during the earliest years. They are provided education in these years. The recent research in child development proves that the first five years are a crucial period in the development of a child and this development directly affects the quality of adult life.

Deeply moved by the backwardness of the people of Naraikkinaru, a village near Tirunelvely missionaries from England established a school in the village in 1895. Even amidst dire circumstances they have founded an asylum known as 'Kirubai Illam'. The Kirubai Illam accommodates orphans and poverty stricken children. There are 350 students at present. Kirubai Illam believes that a child is a positive asset and a valuable national asset.

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28 Ibid, P.23.
resource, who ought to be moulded, nurtured and developed with tenderness and care. Most of the children in Kirubai Illam are from remote villages. This illam (house) aims to reinforce good moral values among the rural kids and also improves the standard of their health and personal hygiene.

Gypsy families are traditional wanderers and a stream of Gypsies began to camp in and around Pettai, a village near Tirunelveli 25 years ago. The Non Governmental Organisation, the SCAD went out to support them and educate them. Many Gypsies have chosen to settle for the majority of their time in Pettai village around the Gypsy school built by SCAD. Today after 25 years SCAD Gypsy school is an institution of repute.

Social Defence for the children

In addition to the meritorious services rendered by the Non-Governmental Organisations in Tirunelveli for the development of the children, the Government also has taken various steps for the development of the children through these Non-Governmental
Organisations. The Department of Social Defence has been providing services for the development of children found in difficult circumstances in Tirunelveli District. The Government provides institutional and non institutional services\textsuperscript{30} for the rehabilitation of the children entering these institutions besides involving the Non-Governmental Organisations\textsuperscript{31} in all the programmes to ensure protection of the rights of the children and their all round development.

The institutions under the Department provide care, treatment, (correctional) training (educational and vocational) and rehabilitation of the children (neglected and children in conflict with law) coming under the provisions of the Juvenile Justice (care and Protection of children) Act, 2000. The Department also provides aftercare services to the boys discharged from the institutions. Neglected children, children in conflict with law, street children, stranded girls and unmarried mothers, women and girls in moral danger, women and girls committing offences under Immoral

\textsuperscript{30} Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, Tiruneveli, op.cit.P.1.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, P.2
Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 and combating traffic and commercially, sexually exploited women and children are taken care of by the Non-Governmental Organisations.

**Child Welfare Committees**

The Government has set up eighteen Child Welfare Committees under section 29(1) of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of children) Act of 2000 to deal with cases of children in need of care and protection. Each child welfare committee consists of a Non-official chairman and four members including one woman member. The Child Welfare Committee constituted in Tirunelveli is vested with the powers of Metropolitan Magistrate or Judicial Magistrate of First Class. The Committee will meet three days a week (Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) in the premises of the notified home\(^{32}\).

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\(^{32}\) Tamil Nadu Corporation For Development of Women, op.cit, P.18.
Juvenile Justice Boards

To deal with cases of the children in conflict with law, Juvenile Justice Boards are constituted. The Boards consist of a metropolitan Magistrate or a judicial magistrate of the first class with two social workers, including one woman social worker, having powers conferred by the code of criminal procedure 1973. The Boards will meet three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) in the premises of the respective Observation Homes. The children are provided food, shelter and clothing as per the scales prescribed in the rules. Education and vocational training are also provided to them. The orphan children are taught upto X Standard, besides imparting vocational training on trades like, carpentry, weaving, mat weaving, book binding, masonry, soap making, tailoring power loom weaving gardening and welding.

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**Juvenile Guidance Bureau**

Juvenile Guidance Bureau are functioning under the Department in Chennai, Madurai, Vellore, Tirunelveli and Coimbatore\(^{34}\). These Bureau investigate the attitude and behavior of the children referred to them by the Child Welfare Justice Boards. The Juvenile Guidance Bureau is also providing counselling and guidance to the children and parents apart from undertaking research programmes on the prevalence of children in conflict with law. This Guidance Bureau attends to the needs of the Observation Homes. These Bureau are run by Non-Governmental Organisation with grant-in-aid from the Government.

**Rehabilitation**

A marriage grant of Rupees 3000 is sanctioned to the children for whom marriage is arranged by the Department. Incentive is given to the children according to their skills. Lump sum assistance of Rupees 500 to Rupees 2500 in the form of tools

\(^{34}\) Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, op.cit, P.19.
and equipment is provided to the discharged children. Job oriented vocational courses are also offered in order to see that the children should earn their own livelihood\textsuperscript{35}.

**Street Children**

The Department of Social Defence is implementing welfare programmes to street children with the involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations\textsuperscript{36}. The shelters provided by the Non-Governmental Organisations provide a safe place to the street children.

Begging by children is highly prevented by persuasion. Children are persuaded to go to schools and the parents are also motivated in such a way to send their children to schools. The Non-Governmental Organisations with the help of Juvenile Aid Police unit round up the children found begging in the city in Tirunelveli.

\textsuperscript{35} Vidyarambam Trust Magazine, Tirunelveli 2011, P.10.
\textsuperscript{36} Arumbugal Trust (N.G.O) Handout, Tirunelveli, 2011, P.3.
and bring them before the child Welfare Committee and tries to rehabilitate them\(^\text{37}\).

Child line is a national 24 hour free, emergency telephone helpline and outreach service for children in need of care and protection. The child line number 1098 is a toll free number that is common in all the cities of India\(^\text{38}\) Child Line India Federation (C.I.F.) was founded in June 1996. Child line is cunningly operational in 73 cities including Tirunelveli in India. This child line is operated by the Non-Governmental Organisations with the financial support of the Government of India\(^\text{39}\).

The commission of Social Defence is the Chairperson of Childline Advisory Board. Child Line aims to reach out the most marginalized children between the age group of 0-18 years and provides interventions related to shelter, medical, repatriation, rescue sponsorships and emotional support and guidance.

\(^{38}\) Saranalayam Hand out, Tirunelveli, 2011, p.2.
\(^{39}\) Puratchi, Annual Report, op.cit, P.5.
Thus the Non-Governmental Organisations and the Government officials in Tirunelveli put forward a joint venture to bring to light the depressed position of neglected children. At the same time the Non-Governmental Organisations and the Government have been exercising yeomen service to develop the position of the neglected children.

The challenge of child labour and their sufferings before us remain daunting but not impossible. The recent experience shows that where community commitment is mobilized people are empowered and adequate resources are allocated, then sustainable work can be done. Child labour and child issue should not be deemed on political lines. It may be in political agenda. But essentially it has to be given national priority. Only then the child issue can be easily settled.

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40 M.N.Parmar and Jaydish Solanki, op.cit, P.87.