Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION
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Empowerment has become a fashionable and buzz word. It essentially means decentralization of authority and power. It aims at getting participation of deprived sections of people in decision making process. In other words, giving voice to the voiceless.

The concept of empowerment aims at rights but they are economic and social rights, the rights to livelihood and to determine one's own future.

According to Batliwala (1995) "The term 'empowerment' has the most conspicuous feature containing the word 'power' which means control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology. The process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power may be treated as empowerment."¹

Thus, EMPOWERMENT can be defined as “a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater decision-making and control and to transformation action."
1.1 Women Empowerment

According to Pattanaik "Women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment-economic, educational, social and political would hasten the pace of social development. Investing the women's 'capabilities' and empowering them to achieve their 'choices' and 'opportunities' is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development."  

"The terms 'Gender justice', 'women empowerment' 'women welfare' are in lime light in the social and economic development analysis of both the developed and developing nations. The debate on gender justice / women empowerment/ women welfare was at the center stage in the international arena in 1994 UN Conference in Cairo; UN's Fourth International Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995 and UN's Social Summit Conference at Copenhagen in March 1995."  

Empowerment of women is a global issue. The concept of empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women movements world wide and particularly by the third world feminists. Empowerment is a notion of rights, but the goal is achievement of economic and social rights for women, which includes the right to livelihood and also provides a specific direction to the future.

Economic development is just one aim of empowerment. There is also an
attempt to improve self-consciousness and to institutionalize all the efforts that contribute to the empowerment of women - socially and psychologically. Participation of women in decision-making and implementation in the family and community: creating mutual interdependence and group solidarity; developing skills, self confidence, and confidentiality. All these are seen as integral part to the process of women empowerment.

Empowerment, as the word suggests, is to empower or enable women to do certain things and in most cases it connotes women wielding political power. A deeper understanding of the word throws light on many of its dimensions and implications. The very concept of empowerment of women which is based on equality between sexes, is a long drawn, conscious and continuous process comprising enhancement of skills, capacity-building, gaining self confidence and meaningful participation in decision making. As the foremost precursor to development, empowerment of women comprehensively seeks to ensure an equitable division of resources and carve a clear role for them in decision-making. It helps the citizens exercise theirs as well as others rights to protest and to assert and participate actively in the democratic process. Empowerment also wards off retrogressive practices like female infanticide and gender based violence.

Pillai (1995), while ascertaining the importance of the women empowerment, states that “empowerment as an active, multidimensional process
which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be bartered, nor can it be given as alms. Power has to be acquired, and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved"4.

The term ‘empowerment’ became popular from mid 1908s in the field of development especially with reference to women. In India it is the Sixth Five-year plan (1980-81), that can be considered a landmark for the cause of women. It is here that the concept of ‘women and development’ was introduced for the first time in the country

Deepthi rightly said that, “It is not surprising that the development of women in India has been the center stage of its development planning since independence though the concept has been evolving from plan to plan. In most South Asian countries the status of women is low and their socio-economic conditions are much more depressed than that of men. In India, while the constitutional and legal status of women is equal to that of men in all aspects, the reality is that they suffer in all spheres of social and economic life. Poverty, in fact is one of the aspects of their deprived condition. Low earning, lower wages, low level of skills, limited access of the factors of production, low literacy, malnutrition, poor standard of health, greater exposure to domestic violence”.5

The year 2001 has been declared as the "International Year of Women’s
Empowerment" for enhancing the status and sustainable achievement in women's empowerment. The Prime Minister of India has appealed to all the citizens to participate actively for promotion of women’s access to quality education, credit, health care, employment, and social security. In this context, Government of India is developing different programmes and strategies establishing different organizations and creating various legal provisions. To achieve this, the Five Year Plans proposed the following major strategies:

- Evolving a National Policy for Empowerment of Women
- To expedite action to legislate ensuring reservation of not less than one third seats for women in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies.
- To adopt an integrated approach towards empowering women through effective convergence of existing services, resources, infrastructure and manpower in both women-specific and women-related sectors.
- To initiate steps to eliminate gender bias in all educational programmes.
- To increase access to credit through setting up of a Development Bank for Women Entrepreneurs in small and tiny sectors.

Some of the major initiatives taken by the government are:

- Dowry Prohibition Act 1961
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971
- Child Marriage Restraint Act 1976
- Equal Remuneration Act 1976
❖ Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act 1986
❖ Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act 1986
❖ Commission of Sati (prevention) act 1987
❖ Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act 1992
❖ 73\textsuperscript{rd} and 74\textsuperscript{th} amendments in the constitution to provide reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities.

National Charter for Women (2001) envisages the following vital inputs for empowerment:

❖ Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
❖ Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
❖ Changing social attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
❖ Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
❖ Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child, and
❖ Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.
From time to time since India's independence various legislations have been passed; programmes and policies have been formulated to protect the interests of women in the country. They have acquired a new status and new role in the present day society. New opportunities have been created. Literacy and employment rates among women have improved over the nineties.

1.2 Education and Information for Women Empowerment

Education has a wider meaning 'Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktya' implying that it is the knowledge which liberates. In the words of Herbert Spencer, "Education is a training for the completeness of life. Education brings protection to life, which means the growth and development of personality. It qualifies a person to fulfil certain economic, political, and cultural functions and there by improves the socio-economic status of the people. It also helps to equalize the status of individuals who belong to different social strata."

1.3 Education and Women Empowerment

According to Pranitha, "Education means acquiring knowledge and not literacy alone. A good education, information is one which has a proper equilibrium between academics, sports, spiritual study, extracurricular activities and value education. Having all this under our education system certainly helps us a lot and aids the betterment of our lives."
Shakunthala Narasimhan opined that, “Education is one means of generating confidence and countering difference. While literacy projects for women have been initiated, these have been only partially successful, due to lack of motivation, and enthusiasm among the target groups, lack of time or facilities (such as child care, relief from house work to enable women to set apart time for literacy classes or unimaginative approaches to course content making them irrelevant to the day to day needs of the women targeted)” 7

The Education helps to liberate women from the shackles of mass ignorance as reading and writing, widens one’s horizons leading to self - confidence, self-assertion and self-dependence. Education is probably the single most important factor in improving a woman’s life. The more schooling she has - the brighter her future, for herself and her family. Although it is true that boys as well as girls benefit from an education, it seems that educating girls actually produces a greater return. In many parts of the world it is the women’s schooling that is the crucial factor in alleviating her family out of poverty. Education does not only enable her to find a job with higher pay and increase her family income, but it also makes her to take better care of herself and her family in all possible ways. A woman will be better nourished and better healthier, and her children will be better educated. She makes her daughters gain more from her education, thus being true to the purpose of the education she herself received.
Bhedauria said that, "It is universally accepted that education is a significant instrument in improving the status of women. There is a close connection between education and development. No society can prosper without making women educated and empowered. The relevance of women's education and literacy to social, economic, cultural, and political development of the individual, family, community and nation is universally acknowledged."

Since the "UN Declaration of the decade of women" in 1975, attention and action on women's concerns have steadily increased and education, whether it be the form of consciousness-raising or skill-acquisition, is one of the areas that women's organizations, government agencies and international donor agencies have focused on. The underlying assumption is that if women understand their conditions, know their rights and learned the skills traditionally denied to them, empowerment will follow. Almost 25 years have passed and there are different views as to whether such assumptions about increasing access to education and training have resulted in the tilting of power balance in favour of women.

For the first time in the history of India a National system of Education is established by the National Policy on Education (1986). It laid emphasis on giving equal opportunities of education to those who have been denied equality so far, particularly women. The idea of education for women's equality, participation and empowerment has been given top priority in Plan of Action (1992) and it impinges on almost all areas and aspects related to different levels of education.
1.4 Information and Women Empowerment

Social development depends on latest and valuable information. Current information has an impact on women health and other social issues like birth rate, infant and mother mortality rate and latest technology, which helps to improve the standard of living. Information for empowerment of women in the third world results in individual empowerment and social transformation whereby women have more control over the lives and more of an effect in the changing society to eliminate or reduce bias and discrimination.

Information revolution though is recent and juvenile, is ever expanding in its premises and challenges. Information is power and acquisition of relevant information, at opportune time, will facilitate decision-making and empowerment.

In the present context of rapidly changing world, where social transformations are called for, there is no other potential tool other than information for empowering the most deprived section i.e. women with effective policy, that is, socially acceptable, economically viable and practically feasible. Information projects will be a major step in realizing the social, political, and economic empowerment of women. The concept of "leapfrogging" is not only applicable in bringing the division between developed and developing world but also bridging the social barrier between the empowered and the disempowered.

According to Udaysankar "Information is a vital resource necessary and
indispensable for the all-round development in all walks of life. Development of a nation depends on its scientific and industrial research and output. The national development is directly proportional to its growth in Science and Technology. For effective research in all these areas adequate information is most essential. So one can say information is the 'sine qua non' for national development. Information centers and libraries play a significant role in information handling and disseminating process, thereby becoming a prominent centre for information. Efficient management of these information centers would result in effective dissemination of Information for national development."  

Ranjan Sinha Thakur opined that, "Information has no value until it is used. Any barriers to the access of information will prevent proper communication and information flow, creating problems for the user. In the challenge of overcoming or minimizing such barriers, will help information management. The implementation of quality control in library and information services is more mechanical and installation-oriented and less organic and adoptive. Consequently there is a specific need for development of an adequate theoretical and methodological framework with relevance of quality control implementation within information process."  

Today information is a key resource for the economic, socio-cultural and political development of a society. It is proving useful in all spheres of the present
day civilization. At the individual level buyers use information to differentiate and choose from a range of products and services in order to ensure better standards of living. Organizations use information as an economic resource to introduce innovation and increase their effectiveness and competitive positions.

This scenario has posed major challenges to the information sector, whose prime function now is to satisfy the complex and increasing demands for information-related products and services. The times when it was enough for librarians and information managers (LIMs) to perform functions aimed at acquiring organizing, and providing reading materials on request are over. The profession must look beyond its traditional scope. In the context of library and information centers (LICs), it means that the Information Manager will have to accept the challenge and play a more proactive role.

Librarians and Information Managers will have to appreciate that just having information and storing it will serve no purpose unless it is put to effective use by those who need it. They should also bring the user and information together. In this context, technological advancements are redefining the way librarians perform their regular functions. For instance Information Technology (IT) is vastly expanding the scope of their work. It is now possible to access and process much greater quantities of information. Computers and CDROMs have found increasing acceptance in library centres; multimedia has shown much potential; and
information networks have broken time and space barriers. Also user expectations are rising constantly creating a demand for ever more sophisticated, high quality information products and services.

Meera said that “Education the single most important factor in improving the ability of girls and women is to take advantage of information technology in education. Information technology can be used both for formal and non-formal education. Education for empowerment means women gaining an understanding and control over to improve their standing in society.”

1.5 Public Libraries - Role of Women Libraries

The public library is meant for all types of people in a community, in a society, in a village, town or city irrespective of age, sex, religion, language, status or literacy level. In other words, Public Libraries should cater to the needs of all the people and they can play an indispensable role as community centres of education, information, recreation and culture. Therefore, Alvin Johnson has rightly called a public library as the “People’s University”.

According to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan the Public Library is: "Any library established and or maintained by a local library authority including the travelling libraries and service, stating any library open to the public free of charge and maintained and managed by the government or by any local body".
The Library Association, London evolved the objectives of a public library in a detailed manner. These are:

1. "Education: to foster and provide means for self development of the individual group at whatever age of education closing the gap between the individual and recorded knowledge;

2. Information: to bring to the individual group - accurate information quickly in depth particularly on topics of current concern;

3. Culture: to be one of principal centres of cultural life and promote a keener participation enjoyment and appreciation of all arts; and

4. Leisure: to play a part in encouraging the productive use of leisure and providing material for change and relaxation."  

UNESCO has gone deep to elucidate the concept of public library, particularly in the developing countries, that is: "the public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times to educate themselves continuously and keep abreast of progress in the science and arts. Its contents should be a living demonstration of the evolution of knowledge and culture constantly reviewed, kept up-to-date and attractively presented. In this way, it will help people to form their opinions and develop their critical capacities and powers of appreciation and ideas, whatever the form in which these may be expressed". 

The public libraries should help the women in fostering education, promoting culture, and disseminating information. Education and information are essential for fostering the informed citizen necessary for a democratic society. In many different societies, libraries, as places for public gathering, are providers of reference and information services on site. In upholding the principles of public access to information and in support of formal education, collective and individual libraries are the essential institutions within a democratic society.

Electronic networking among public libraries will provide new opportunities: the means to streamline the collection and management of resources and the ability to provide resources for distance education programmes to communities and individuals around the world. Libraries, forum for public discourse, continue this role in the new on-line environment as they move to become centre for social computing, facilitators of access and equitable providers of essential services and content to the new information society.

The freedom to read and to have access to information unrestricted by censorship are essential to ensuring the free flow of ideas that is so critical to the development and maintenance of a democratic society. It is freedom in these areas allows citizens to educate themselves, in an enabling process that enriches both the citizen and the society. Perhaps the most important role public libraries will continue to play on the stage of the evolving information society is that of a
defender and champion of these basic forms of freedom for every individual and collectivity.

A modern public library is meant to offer opportunities to one and all, to help them develop according to their own capacities and taste and to help them to become better citizens. Women library is a part of public library system providing special opportunities for women to develop themselves. Women libraries are the nucleus of institutional base for educating women. Women library is a rock on which the new social and economic life of women can be constructed. To provide a sound base for new construction resent women libraries of Andhra Pradesh need to undergo qualitative improvements.

National Educational Policy 1986 has laid emphasis on educating women to achieve the duel objectives of equality and upliftment. Women libraries can be effective tools to realize the objective. They will remove all limitations over the achievement in the fields of employment, training, utilization of health facilities, and exercise of their legal rights to avoid their exploitation and achieve the status. But in prevailing social conditions, women were reluctant to use freely the public organizations as men frequently visited these. The ‘purdah’ system was largely responsible for this situation. During the library movement a separate place was reserved for women in the library. By 1914-1915, five women libraries were established. These libraries attracted women and inculcated reading habits among
them. It was one of the methods used for emancipation of women through awakening. Saraswati Niketanam Library had a separate section for women and children and appointed a lady assistant as its in-charge. Even a “society for women” was established for sponsoring of this library. With regard to the Zilla Grandhalaya Samsthas in Andhra Pradesh; there are very few branch libraries exclusively for women and some branch libraries are common for women and children. So there is a need to establish a separate wing followed by mobile service for women users not only at district level but also at mandal and village level.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Women as class appeared to be the most oppressed and exploited. Andhra Pradesh is no exception to this regard. Superstitions, religious observations and social taboos further restrict the opportunities available to women and their participation. So, it is the need of the hour to enlighten women by providing them information and education. The present study made an attempt to examine how far the public libraries are helping for women empowerment. Even after the lapse of 57 years of independence public libraries have not developed up to the mark because of various reasons. As on today there is no comprehensive and systematic study conducted in Andhra Pradesh, with regard to the role of public libraries in empowering women by providing education and information. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction.
1.7 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the existing services to women users in public libraries
2. To identify special services required by ZGS to women users.
3. To identify information needs for women in electronic age.
4. To study feasibility of opening women section/women library in each ZGS, Mandal (branch libraries), and village libraries.
5. To examine the possibilities of introducing electronic information services exclusively for women in the present digital world.
6. To examine the possible linkage in between public libraries and academic institutions for extending continuous education programme through public libraries.
7. To study the linkage in between women organizations and public libraries in relation to women empowerment.
8. To examine the existing physical facilities provided by ZGS so as to identify the specific needs of women users for utilizing the library.
9. To examine the current situation regarding extension activities and cultural programmes extended for women users in ZGS so as to suggest suitable measures to improve these activities towards women empowerment.

1.8 Hypotheses of the Study

1. Mobile libraries have influence on the improvement of women users in public library.
2. Public libraries need to open separate women-wings through separate Mahila Grandhalayas in every district head quarters.

3. The membership ratio between men and women is not in proportion to population strength.

4. Women users do not utilize the public libraries for improving their knowledge-level; but the majority among them visit the library for fiction-reading only.

5. Women students do form a major group of women-users in the public libraries.

6. The public libraries are not maintaining cordial relationship with women organizations for co-operative efforts towards women empowerment.

7. The public libraries are providing distant education services through text book, collection and competitive exams cell but there is no linkage between educational institutions and public libraries.

8. The physical facilities provided by ZGS are almost uniform and common as they are funded by Director of Public Libraries (DPL) and followed by uniform principles and regulations.

9. Since almost all ZGS are providing conventional/traditional services, there would not be much difference between one and the others. It means the services provided by ZGS are common and similar to one another.
1.9 Methodology of the Study

Methodology is the scientific representation of the procedure of the whole work dealt with the study particularly the objectives of the study, population sample, type of instrument, interview process, analysis and report writing.

This study includes collection of information both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected from DRTC, Bangalore, NIRD, Hyderabad, State Central Library, Hyderabad, Osmania University Library, British Library, Hyderabad, State Regional Library, Guntur. Fruitful discussions were conducted with the concerned officers at DPL, Hyderabad. With regard to the secondary data a systematic questionnaire was designed and divided into two categories. The first is meant for secretaries to collect planning, policies prevailing in public libraries in Andhra Pradesh. The second is meant for women - users as the study is aimed at women empowerment so as to know their information needs and requirements. Finally the national, regional newspapers, Government publications, brochures, and other published and unpublished literature relevant to this study were also made use of.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

The public library system prevailing in India in different States is uniform and so far only 10 States have enacted legislation for organizing Public Libraries in India. Since A.P. is one among the states, which enacted public library legislation, this study is limited to ZGS functioning in the State of Andhra Pradesh.
1.11 Plan of the Study

The thesis has been organized into five chapters as detailed below:

Chapter I: Highlights the concepts and definition of the problem, scope, objectives, hypothesis and methodology of the study.

Chapter II: Presents literature survey on women empowerment contributions of Government of India towards women empowerment, constitutional efforts, legislation, commissions and committees, five year plans, programmes, and schemes, voluntary organizations towards women empowerment and also highlights in nutshell the studies conducted in the direction of women empowerment in India.

Chapter III: Describes Public library system U.K., U.S.A. and India. It discusses the Committees on Public Libraries. Describes Public library legislation in India. It also discusses the current scenario of public libraries in Andhra Pradesh. Highlights education and information services of public libraries including information technology role in Public Libraries.

Chapter IV: This chapter comprises an analysis of the study. The first section of this chapter presents a brief account of Zilla Grandhalaya Samsthas in Andhra Pradesh. The second section of it discusses the analysis of the questionnaire - I meant for secretaries by presenting tables, diagrams through
statistical application. The third section illustrates the analysis of the questionnaire - II meant for women users.

Chapter V: This chapter discusses the findings drawn from the study and offer suggestions based on study relevant to the context of Public libraries towards women empowerment. Finally conclusions have also been included.

References


