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The Collective Enterprises of the Tribal Women -Successful, Sustainable, Sinewy: A Study of Women Cooperatives in Jharkhand

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the impact of women's collective entrepreneurship initiatives taken in Jharkhand, India. It also tries to highlight the impact on the empowerment of tribal women of Jharkhand. The debate continues across the globe for negotiating space for women in the chase of equity. The development of tribal women in Jharkhand has mostly remained constrained to their partaking in various developmental projects and programs run by the government and non-government organizations. Group enterprising activities in the tribal region of Jharkhand have revealed the potential of tribal women as a capable entrepreneur and successful leaders. The study reveals that women from tribal communities of Jharkhand have traditionally been excluded in society to lead and refrained women from any leadership positions. It also discloses that with facilitation and support, the women from a disadvantaged section also confirm the capabilities to govern successful collective enterprises. The study also raises the questions of concern for evaluating the impact of such women's collective entrepreneurship on women empowerment, economic independence, and equity.

Keywords: *Collective Enterprises, Tribal women of Jharkhand, Women empowerment, women's enterprises.*

Introduction

Economic prosperity of a section of community is base for measurement of development of that community. Economic independence opens door for improvement in other sociocultural

changes. Women get bargaining power for equitable treatment in society. In all economic gainful engagements women are always left behind as first pair is taken by men folk. Given a chance women from any community surprises through the outcomes they bring.

In last few decades all the developmental policies are framed in such manner to give priority for women. It has been a gamechanger for women in general. Tribal women in Jharkhand have taken advantage of it and created a new world of economic prosperity and demonstrated that they are equally capable of running successful enterprises.

In Jharkhand women from major tribal community Munda, Oraon, and Santhal has been governing successful and sustainable poultry cooperatives for last two decades. Traditionally, running a successful enterprises is visualised as well as considered predominantly the work of menfolk. These successful enterprises has not only created economic independence to these women but also the opportunity to show the world that they are equally capable human being. The collective enterprises in Jharkhand is giving livelihood opportunity for thousands of families in tribal dominated far-flung areas. It creates hope for many other such disadvantaged families.

Objective of the study

This paper is trying to bring forth unexplored as well as unreported potential of governing successful collective enterprises by tribal women of Jharkhand. These women are governing multiple cooperatives for almost two decades (2002 to 2020). This paper looks into the following questions

- Can tribal women govern successful enterprises?
- What is making them govern successful collective enterprises for decades?

These questions interpret into the following objectives of the study

- To explore the protagonist of tribal women in Cooperatives of Jharkhand
- To deliberate the probable reasons of successful collective enterprises in Jharkhand

- To gauge into the potentials for tribal women governing successful business enterprises

Methodology

- Literature review
- A case of women's federation of poultry cooperatives of Jharkhand.
- Analysing and concluding

Collective Enterprises for women

Enterprises are associated with business or profit making entities. It has been mostly individual or clan based engagements. When it is collective the perception and engagement both changes. Rule of game changes, engagement methodologies changes to run an enterprise successful and sustainable. If it is of women than it become more complicated. Hardly women are considered enterprising. But it is women who have the potential to establish the collective enterprises. The way out they have identified is cooperative societies. Woman hold individual capabilities but it get multiplier effect when they become collective. Similar is the case with women collectives as cooperatives.

Cooperatives are defined as 'autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'(International Co-operative Alliance (1995).

The cooperative movement can be traced back to the first half of the eighteenth century in England by William King. Soon several social workers from European countries, America, and Asia took over the movement for addressing various socio-economic problems in the geography.

In the year 1904, the formal inception of the movement for cooperatives began in India, when the Cooperative society Act got enacted. Later, in 1912 the current act got replaced by the Cooperative society act. Since then, the Cooperative movement in India has travelled a long way and has become the largest in the world with a membership of more than 274 million members in almost 0.8 million cooperatives.

A policy brief by copac coop¹, for Cooperative Women and Gender Equality, includes that the cooperatives are going to be the major contributor for Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) for gender equality, as it increases the opportunity for women's access to economic gain and resources. It further reports, women in the cooperatives in South Africa are 60% by its membership, whereas in Japan's consumer cooperatives and fashion cooperatives of Italy, women members are 95% in both geographies. Many countries are now forming and promoting women-only cooperatives. These all will create opportunities for women in economic affairs along with social inclusion.

Dr Nandini Azad, acting chairperson, ICA-AP Women's Committee, President, Indian Cooperative Network for Women Ltd. at the Global Conference and General Assembly 14-17 Nov 2017 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) in Gender Equality Workshop, she shares on the topic- Gender Affirmatives – Why Women in Cooperatives

- Different forms of collectivization like Cooperatives and other forms for economic and social enterprises have been significantly beneficial in cultivating the women's capacities.
- Empower women to unite for solidarity and support, it is required to organizing women into different forms of collective enterprises, One such effective form is women Cooperative.
- Increased economic security, acquire entrepreneurial skills, increase contributions to the economic and social/physical well-being of their families.

The researchers have proven that women empowerment and space for women in leadership positions require to engage and work upon all the sectors in place of addressing gender only. The areas of all-round engagements that need to focus together are socio-economic empowerment, education along with building capabilities, economic independence, encouragements to create gender norms, accessibility to the resources, political space, and institutional arrangements to give

¹Cooperatives women and Gender equality, policy brief by committee for promotion and advancement of cooperatives, copac coop, www.copac.coop

organizational strength for women. These areas will create realistic decision-making power for empowering women.

Tribal Women of Jharkhand

Jharkhand is the habitat of 30 notified Scheduled tribes out of which Santhal(34%), Oraon (19.6%), Munda (14.8%) & HO (10.5%)². They are different in sociocultural practices, yet all of them are called Scheduled tribes of Jharkhand.

The customary systems and law of all the tribal community in Jharkhand are different that regulates the respective tribe. It includes not only the social norms of living and resource utilization but also governs themselves through it. Their collective approach and sociocultural orientation give them distinctiveness from others. Their traditional governance system embodied democratic values. Researchers have been reporting repetitively that different tribes in Jharkhand have a traditional system of political governance even long before the kingdom rule system came into existence. These traditional systems face criticisms for the exclusion practices of women in them. These systems do not allow women to participate, particularly in the decision-making process of society.

Womenfolk in these communities play a vital role in the livelihood & sustainability of families. Tribal women work at farm fields, collecting forest products and firewood, grazing of cattle, bringing things of daily use for the household from the market in addition to routine household chores. In other words, more than two-third work of total family-level work is being done by women in tribal families, yet they are not allowed to participate directly in the traditional governance system of respective tribes. Women are never considered leaders of their village and society. That is why they exhibit almost zero visibility especially in a leadership role. Their negligible visibility does not mean they lack potential and capabilities. There is a centuries-old norm in the tribal society of Jharkhand that women have no property rights. Even after the Independence of India and a separate state of Jharkhand (the movement of a separate state of Jharkhand was for the betterment of tribal), no shift in the role played by women in tribal societies at large is evident.

² Census of India 2001.

The case of small holders poultry cooperatives of women in Jharkhand

The patriarchy strongly prevails in the tribal society of Jharkhand. Women are the most sufferer of these hundreds of year old societal arrangement. The potential tribal women of Jharkhand have is not flourishing in the lack of support and movement of these women. The collective enterprises are promising strategy for empowering tribal women of Jharkhand. In the similar line, women from the different tribal communities of Jharkhand took advantage of the cooperative movement just after formation the state of Jharkhand. They denied all the perceptions about them in Jharkhand and initiated the cooperatives for their economic prosperity. These women have been governing successful poultry cooperatives across the state for almost two decades. These are giving direct employment to hundreds of youth and sustainable livelihood opportunities to thousands of families.

Jharkhand women self-supporting poultry cooperative federation limited (JWSPCFL), Ranchi Jharkhand. One of the largest integration of poultry production of smallholders, only enterprise in Jharkhand having 3 hatcheries, 5 feed mills, parent broiler breeder farm & layer farm for commercial egg production with broiler poultry production. The enterprise is working with more than 130 staff of different department including Production, Marketing, Accounts & Finance along with hatchery & feed mill management. Almost 300 skilled para-veterinary personnel are supporting and providing required services at door step of producer members. The enterprise is fully owned and governed by rural women of Jharkhand.

Board of directors of JWSPCFL as per Annul report 2018-19

Sl. No.	Name of Board Members	Designation	Gender
1	Anjana Sardar	President	Female
2	Bhagwati Devi	Vice President	Female
3	Kajri Devi	Board Member	Female
4	Phulmani Bhengra	Board Member	Female
5	Jasmati Bhengra	Board Member	Female
6	Dr Pankaj Das	Ex. Officio Director	Male

Member profiles as per JWSPCFL annual report of FY 18-19.

Sl. No.	Particulars	No.
1	No. of member cooperative	11
2	Total no. of members	5072
3	Total no. of women members	5072
4	Total no. of ST members	4268
5	Total no. of SC members	105
6	Total no. of OBC members	699

All cooperative members are women. 84% of members belong to the scheduled tribe. JWSPCFL get registered on 31st March 2005 as a federation of all the women poultry cooperatives in Jharkhand.

To begin the activity, the Government of Jharkhand supported the initiative of the women's poultry cooperative. The financial support for the first two years was a game-changer for the tribal women in different districts of Jharkhand. Currently, the state-level cooperative federation has 11 member cooperative from Gumla, Khunti, Lohardaga, East Singhbhum, Bokaro, Godda, and Dumka districts. The chairperson of the respective primary cooperatives governing board constitutes the governing board of the state-level federation. The poultry production operation of the state federation is the largest in eastern India. Together they are more than 5000 women poultry producer members. They are having the capacity of handling ten lakhs of chicks placement per month. All the cooperative societies along with federation are registered under the Jharkhand Self-supporting co-operative act 1996. All of them are associated with National Small-holder Poultry Development Trust (NSPDT). Somelimited facts and figures of JWSPCFL, Ranchi

- The membership has been continuously increasing and has reached more than 10 times in 16 years.
- During 2017-18 minor cut in sales turnover, else it is ever increasing.
- Income to members as grower charges
- The income earned by the members during 16 years of operation is amounting together Rs 6853 Lakhs.

Membership	
Financial Year	no. of members
2003-04	475
2004-05	829
2005-06	1380
2006-07	2100
2007-08	2500
2008-09	3235
2009-10	3467
2010-11	3869
2011-12	4007
2012-13	4263
2013-14	4269
2014-15	4330
2015-16	4386
2016-17	4660
2017-18	4670
2018-19	5072

Sales turnover	
Financial Year	Sales value Rs in lakh
2003-04	142
2004-05	299
2005-06	771
2006-07	993
2007-08	1253
2008-09	2689
2009-10	3189
2010-11	4208
2011-12	5094
2012-13	5719
2013-14	6987
2014-15	8361
2015-16	9094
2016-17	10010
2017-18	9953
2018-19	11096

Income to Members	
Financial Year	Amount Rs in Lakh
2003-04	12
2004-05	19
2005-06	72
2006-07	87
2007-08	92
2008-09	251
2009-10	348
2010-11	309
2011-12	339
2012-13	563
2013-14	625
2014-15	959
2015-16	790
2016-17	808
2017-18	786
2018-19	793

All these facts and figures are sufficiently telling the story of success of women poultry cooperative in Jharkhand.

As per bye laws and act under which these society is running has rule of rotating leadership for board of directors and the board of directors get elected through democratic processes.

Dr Pankaj Das mentor and CEO of JWSPCFL says, Members and representatives of all the cooperatives get regular trainings, information, motivational engagements and participate in decision making processes. This has been the non-negotiable process engagement since the cooperative got organized is core of the success of poultry cooperative in Jharkhand.

Leader women from all the cooperatives are role models for all members in the cooperative. They are a disciplined member, act as a democratic leader. They take responsibilities and risks for the growth of cooperatives, allow managers to work with sense of accountability and create minimal interference, keep a close eye on the performances of

staff, seek help in need from authentic person/institutions and look for opportunities for betterment of business growth. These representative leaders also function to transfer the roles and responsibilities to new representatives.

Findings of this exploratory study

- It is evident that women can govern successful collective enterprises even though they belong to disadvantaged section of society.
- Women have all the capabilities to lead institutions of economic activities even they may not be visibly active in main stream.
- Economic freedom is one of strong area for women to become empowered as in the case of tribal women of Jharkhand through collective enterprise of poultry production.
- Democratic values in governing enterprises is key mantra of success.

Concluding

Women are also the bread earner of families is a truth. Women are capable of running an enterprise. A Collective enterprise for economic upliftment governed by tribal women in Jharkhand is a model for women of all the disadvantaged society.

Research Literature has given supporting shreds of evidence that cooperatives are contributors to increasing the opportunity for women's access to resources and economic gain. Tribes of Jharkhand are different in sociocultural practices. They govern themselves with centuries-old customary practices. These arrangements have excluded women of their right to participate in the social decision-making process. Tribal women from the tribes of Jharkhand are full of potential and capabilities. The patriarchal practices are deep-rooted in the tribal society of Jharkhand as in other societies across world.

Women from the tribal community of Jharkhand have taken root of coming out of all the shackles of societal norms through organizing themselves in cooperative for economic independence. These steps have helped them not only in achieving income need but also to exercise the leadership act to show the potential they have. The poultry cooperatives

are owned and governed by rural women of Jharkhand. It has been possible by getting support from the Government of Jharkhand. Handholding, capacity build, motivation, and encouragement to latent potential have made their enterprise the largest poultry production operation by women in eastern India. This is evidence of women from a disadvantaged section of society can govern successful enterprises.

Women in cooperatives create a more supportive environment for women to expedite and demonstrate the potential. With small encouragement, tribal women do wonder. In the case of governing the economic enterprise, tribal women of Jharkhand have expressed the latent potential they have. For almost two decades in Jharkhand, few village-based tribal women of Santhal, Oraon & Munda communities have governed at least 11 women cooperatives of poultry production very successfully. The economic freedom provided during the last two decades to thousands of members of these exclusive women cooperatives is another strong reason to look further into the prospects of collective enterprises for women from disadvantaged section of society.