

# Empowering Women through Vocational Training

(A Case Study of Rural Women in Jalandhar District)



**Monica Sharma**

Director,  
Gandhian Studies Centre,  
KMV, Jalandhar, Punjab

## Abstract

A lot has been written on the status of women in India as to the great respect they received in the ancient period to the decline in the medieval period and a resurgence during the national movement under Mahatma Gandhi. Our constitution too provided the women equality before law thus opening up to them new avenues in politics, administration, science, medicine etc. Today they enjoy more liberty and equality than any other phase in history, there is hardly any area in which the women have not proved their mettle. With the Hindu Code bill which gives daughters equal right to property and Indian Marriage Act in place the women in India should have been in a very strong position. But on the contrary despite the various legislations the overall picture is very pathetic. The women even today are in no better condition, the multiple pressures have resulted in mounting stress levels in the women in general. The need of the hour is to have a more practical approach by reaching out to these women through various programmes, to recognise and address their problems. This study is aimed to address this lacuna. It was a project conducted by the women empowerment cell set up by me in which free vocational Training is provided to girls and women of the villages.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Vocational, Training, Fashion Designing, Cosmetology, Life Skills.

## Introduction

Having been involved with the training of rural women for over a decade now I have realised that the most important requirement of the day is to empower these women both economically as well as emotionally. We have been providing free vocational training in Fashion Designing, Cosmetology and basic Computers in the Women Empowerment Cell setup for this purpose. This also motivated me to take up this study to test the relevance of such vocational training programmes in empowering these women. This paper is based on the study conducted on these women it is broadly divided into two parts-

First: A brief outline of the vocational Training Programmes.

Second: Discussion of the results of the project along with some case studies.

## Part One: Vocational Training Programmes

Education has been seen as a tool for empowering, a fact that was acknowledged by all. Gandhi Ji added another dimension to it when he emphasized the need for vocational training in his system of education. These were basically practical courses which provided skills and experience directly linked to a future career, in other words equips a person to earn a livelihood. It plays an important role in preparing and qualifying people to meet the requirements for a qualified work force in various vocational and technical areas by creating skilled manpower. A typical Vocational training program involves development of technical capacity, entrepreneurship, and business skills. Ideally, it is demand-oriented and helps in building specific skills tailored to prospective employers' needs.

Even after almost seven decades of independence one finds Gandhiji's emphasis on vocational training equally relevant. In Indian educational system, three years of under graduate studies does not equip girls to meet the challenges of the world. Girls, more than boys, lack access to financial capital and have limited opportunities to gain education, knowledge, and skills that can lead to economic advancement. Inadequate policy frameworks and inequitable gender norms also often create barriers to the economic advancement of the girls. Under such circumstances it is

important to provide them with some life skill training to enable them to be financially independent and progressive in life. This is more relevant for the women belonging to rural areas as their access to education is limited as a result of which they have not actively participated in their emancipation.

Women are generally treated as second-class citizens in societies across the globe, more so in a country like ours. They are seen as someone to look after the home and bear children. The condition of the rural women is worse, excluded from receiving higher education and entirely dependent on their male counterparts, they have to bear the brunt of most of the evils like dowry, domestic violence etc. Being a patriarchal society, women and girls are not allowed to step out of their houses which lead to lower educational status, low confidence to face the world. In view of the financial constraints that a family faces, this skill-building program strives to empower the women, and community at large. It was observed, if some kind of skill is imparted to the women, it would give them more avenues to earn their living. The present study aims to assess the effectiveness of vocational training for rural girls and see whether such training is instrumental in empowering them. Parameters like decision making, self efficacy, social competence and financial independence would be used as criteria for empowerment.

## Part Two: Research Project

Having been involved with the women empowerment by providing them life skills for almost a decade I have arrived at two conclusions, one is that such programmes do help girls and secondly these girls equipped with some sort of life skill training is on many parameters more empowered than the girls who pass out with a bachelors degree after putting in three years in college. WE started our women empowerment cell with the sole aim to follow the principles of Gandhiji by providing free vocational training to the girls and women of the rural areas in the Jalandhar district. Having started we came to know of the various problems faced by this section. The regular problems faced by the girls in patriarchal families were just a small part of it. Placed in the Doaba Region of Punjab where the Canadian dream is seen in the eyes of almost all, there is a section of beautiful young brides whose dream has been shattered by the NRI grooms who took the flight after the weddings never to return again. Such brides emotionally wrecked, and stigmatised far from getting solace from the families are considered a burden. There is another section of women who are affected by the rampant drug menace, facing the daily struggles of addicted male folk and some of them loosing their close ones in the battle is the sad fact of many of the households in the villages of the region. Interacting with such women during the training made us evolve new techniques to make our programmes more effective. As now the challenge was not only in imparting them life skill training, but also providing counselling and mentoring to build up the low self esteem of these women. Having done our part, I decided to test the effectiveness of the vocational training on empowering the women. Developing skills

for employment and self-employability, particularly to the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society would be the focus of the study. An attempt was also made to understand the concept of 'women empowerment', the necessity of empowerment in this age of globalization, the challenges faced while undergoing empowerment and figure out if women willing to empower themselves or are they still clinging to the familial values and traditions. Are the families willing to let their women – the 'Devi' of their house step outside their house?

## Conceptual Framework

To begin with we need to understand the meaning and definitions of women empowerment for an empirical study. According to the Collins Dictionary "the empowerment of a person or group of people is the process of giving them power and status in a particular situation". The World Bank's Source book on Empowerment and Poverty Reduction refers to empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and action, it applies to women as well as other disadvantaged or socially excluded group.

A wide range of empirical studies from diverse disciplines have attempted to measure various aspects of women's empowerment. Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as 'The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.' This definition serves as good reference point for conceptualizing and measuring women's empowerment. Scholars across the world from different fields use different interpretation of the word empowerment depending on the need and scope of their study. Charmus & Wieringa (2003) have linked it to the enhancing the ability to make choices, whereas Okaley (2007) relates it to power. In simple words, the women empowerment is a process to enhance self-confidence of the women, so that she can derive benefits from different social, political and economic opportunities. Alaka Basu of UN Foundation has said: "It's now such an overused word. You are empowered if you have a choice of 10 different shampoos in the grocery store; you are empowered if you have 100 kinds of cereals to buy; you are empowered by virtually anyone wanting to sell you something". Stromquist (1995) considered political participation as the most important determinant of empowerment. He is of the view that it is the political participation that develops capacity among women to analyse, organise and mobilise resources for social change.

Kapur (2001), in the study, "Empowering the Indian Women" tried to discuss, analyse and answer the challenging questions as to why, despite all the efforts and progress made, there continues to be so much of gender discrimination and what strategies, actions and measures are to be undertaken to achieve the expected goal of empowerment. She opined that women's empowerment is much more likely to be achieved if women have total control over their own organisations, which they can sustain, both financially and managerially, without direct dependence on others. That is, women themselves should be significant actors in the process of change and not just be mere recipients. Kabeer's (2001)

conceptualisation of women's empowerment in terms of strategic life choice comprises three inter-related components: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made, and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices.

In short, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives. Since Vocational training provides such life skills leading to enhancement in financial independence and subsequent empowerment. In this study the parameters like decision making, self efficacy, social competence and financial independence would be assessed the path towards empowering the women.

### Objectives:-

1. To understand the concept of 'women empowerment'.
2. To study the challenges faced by women while undergoing empowerment.
3. To investigate the perceptions of women for their willingness to empower themselves.
4. To study the effectiveness of vocational training for rural girls coming from economically weak and lower classes.

### Hypotheses

1. Having been trained in life skills they will be financially more independent at the end of study as compared to those who are not receiving vocational training.
2. The women belonging to the marginalised sections will have an enhanced status within their own family setup as well as in the village society.

### Methodology

This was an empirical study designed mainly to find out the effectiveness of a Vocational training programme in empowering women from a trainees perspective. Besides the other tools a number of case studies were undertaken to evaluate the programme. The project took nearly years to complete. It started with the enrolment of the women into the courses, free life skill training was provide to the girls in Fashion designing, cosmetology and basic computers. The training included workshops by people from the industry, doctors, banks. To build their confidence and self esteem individual and group counselling was provided to the girls. Personality enhancement workshops were also organised at regular intervals during the course. Once the course was complete an effort was made to support the women in finding employment Regular follow-ups during and post completion of course to assess their social and economical impact was also undertaken.

### Study Conducted by Us

1. The sample was inclusive. The target group consisted of 115 females in the age range of 18-45 years from different villages of Jalandhar district who had come to our entre to receive training. None of them was enrolled in any institution providing formal education. They were all from low income group families.

2. A Pretest in the form of Questionnaire was given to these women at the start of the course .It rendered the following results.
3. 90% of women among low income group could not access higher education due to following reasons
4. Economic hardship of parents.
5. Parents who wanted to keep their daughters within the security of homes.
6. Hindrance of relatives and neighbors even if the parents agreed.
7. Marriageable age was another factor which demanded their staying within the traditional image of a woman
8. 95% of these women had no decision making powers. Could not even go to market on their will.
9. 70% would be forced into marriages without their consent.
10. 100% were not aware of their legal rights.
11. None of them had a general medical check up and most did not know their blood groups.
12. All wanted to be economically independent.
13. They wanted to learn some vocational or technical skill to earn their livelihood.
14. All wanted to take their own decisions and be independent at least financially.

### Vocational Training Imparted

1. We started a free vocational training in our centre which is successfully running for the past six years.
2. Six to nine months of training is provided to the rural girls in
3. Dress designing and stitching, Cosmetology, Food preservation, Candle making and Basic computers.

### Conclusions

1. Before the programme the women were facing many challenges and stress. The responses can be summed up as
2. 73% girls did not have same status as their brothers
3. 71% could not take their own decisions.
4. 52% were hesitant in interacting with others.
5. 79% were dependent on other for basic necessities.
6. 55% could not express their feelings easily.
7. 79% were sensitive.
8. 58% could not make up their mind easily
9. 87% Wanted to learn something new provided an opportunity.
10. 84% were willing to work outside their homes.

### After the programme

1. The responses given after the programme were more encouraging.
2. 95% felt more confident
3. 97.36% were confident to take their own decisions.
4. 87% were part of decision making in family
5. 95% felt slight improvement in their status comparable to the brothers.
6. 73% did not feel hesitant in their status comparable to the brothers.
7. 73% did not depend on others basic necessities now.

8. 97% could express their feelings freely now.
9. 100% wanted to work outside home.
10. 100% accepted the training had changed their status, made them more confident and gave feeling of self satisfaction.

The results of continuous training and regular counseling were encouraging. It raised the confidence level and self esteem .Alleviated the stress of being under privileged. Economic independence and exposure to college life enhanced their personalities. They developed awareness of one another's problems and felt a sense of cohesiveness and bondage which is necessary to emerge from state of mental isolation and sense of inferiority.

Studies have proved that a number of factors have been responsible for generating stress among the women which further cause deprivation and suffering in their lives. Amelioration of such condition is possible only by making them empowered through such vocational training programmes which provide life skills to the women coupled with personality and confidence building programmes designed for them. Our case studies further strengthened our belief in such programmes. There are numerous examples of widows, deserted NRI brides and women with extremely low self esteem going back to their villages after the training with a new confidence .Equipped with the skills and at times with support from our side these women are earning decent money and looking after themselves and also contributing to the families. Some of them have opened up their own Beauty parlors and tailoring shops and are providing training to the girls in the area. Mere Discussions are not going to help the women the need of the hour is to

design such vocational training programmes and make them accessible to women in villages across the country.

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