

Bridging Welfare and Activism: A Critical Study of the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society

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ABSTRACT

Beyond rights and awareness, APWWS also provides counselling services to women in distress. This highlights the Society's recognition that empowerment must address the psychological and emotional dimensions of women's struggles. Survivors of domestic violence, women facing family disputes, or those simply burdened by economic precarity have found in APWWS a safe space for listening, empathy, and guidance.

The inclusion of emotional support illustrates an important theoretical point: empowerment is not only structural but also personal. As feminist psychologists argue, healing trauma and rebuilding self-worth are preconditions for agency. APWWS's counselling services embody this principle.

Keywords : Psychological and emotional dimensions, listening, empathy, and guidance.

Introduction

Today, women have made remarkable strides in various fields, standing shoulder to shoulder with men in every aspect of life. They have shattered long-held biases and disproven stereotypes that once confined them to traditional roles. Women are excelling in politics, governance, business, education, science, technology, defense, sports, and social work, proving that gender is no limitation to achievement. Female leaders now hold key political offices, lead multinational corporations, drive scientific discoveries, and contribute to groundbreaking innovations. Their presence in male-dominated sectors such as the military, aviation, and space exploration signifies a major shift in societal attitudes toward gender roles.

While significant strides have been made in advancing women's rights, the fight for true equality is far from over. Although significant progress has been made toward gender equality in the fast-paced modern world, where men and women are increasingly recognized as equal in social, economic, and political spheres, women continue to face persistent discrimination. The evolution of society has not eradicated gender-based biases; rather, it has introduced new challenges that complicate the path to true equality. While legal frameworks and policy reforms have granted women more rights and opportunities, deeply ingrained societal norms, structural inequalities, and institutionalized discrimination continue to hinder their full participation in various domains.

Women from many stable and privileged families had access to education, much like their male counterparts. They also enjoyed a degree of economic independence, actively participating in professions such as teaching, weaving, spinning, and agricultural

work. Additionally, women held religious rights and were recognized in sacred texts, with their presence and influence prominently depicted in epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana. The institution of "swayamvara" provided women with the agency to choose their own spouses, highlighting the autonomy they had in marital decisions.

Females of many stable and privileged families got their education like the males in the family. There was economic freedom to women as they engaged in teaching, weaving, spinning and agricultural work. They had religious rights and were mentioned, in epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Even when women in the Vedic period enjoyed so much liberty and freedom, they did enjoy property rights. There was no share given to women under her father's property and as a woman as wives had very less share in their husband's property but they were entitled to a quarter of their husband's wealth. Regardless of the lack of power in the inheritance of property, women in Vedic time enjoyed honorable status.

Women also rose to positions of power, ruled empires, and played decisive roles in shaping the political landscape of India in the medieval ages. Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar, Razia Sultan and Rani Durgavati exemplify how women defied societal norms and led with strength and wisdom. Their legacies serve as a powerful reminder that women are not just equal contributors to society but are also capable of leading, governing, and reshaping history. Their courage, intellect, and leadership skills stand as a testament to the immense potential of women when given the chance to rise above societal constraints.

Review of Related Literature

The Women Welfare Society is a social or community based organisation which strive for the socio- economic and political welfare of the women community engaged at international, national and state level. It is an aspiration of underprivileged women, children and other vulnerable groups of the community. Lots of literature works has been carried out by the various writers on the women welfare or empowerment.

G. Madhavi (2011) 'Women's Welfare Programmes' provides highlights on the impact of the government welfare programmes being implemented for the upliftment of women, especially in rural areas. It is an attempt to analysis to understand the status and the living standards of the poor and downtrodden rural women and the way they are coming forward to avail benefits of these programmes and schemes. its brings out an understanding not only about the impact of the welfare programmes with regard to health, education, employment etc., but also about the expectations and suggestions of the beneficiary women in the context of more effective implementation of the programmes. Consequently, this book suggests the need and also the various ways for the development and well-being of rural women across India.

Rameshwari Pandya (2008), 'Women Welfare and Empowerment in India: Vision for 21st Century' is an attempt to understand the efforts that's have been made to empower women socially, economically, and politically. Its talk about the integrated policy and strategy formulated to address the economic, social, and political issues related to women, along with the requisite programs and schemes and various hurdles which pose play major role in satisfactory implementation of these policy and schemes. The book

covers discussion on Health, Nutrition, and Fertility of Women, Education and Training of Women, employment of Women, Self-help Groups and Empowerment of Women, Problems of Rural Women and Human Rights. However, the books have no discussion on the tribal women of Arunachal Pradesh and its welfare agencies in particular.

Tiwari, Om Prakash (2002), 'Women's Rights in India' discussed about all the rights enjoyed by the women in India with legal sanctions. It is mainly focused on rights of women under international law, under the constitution of India and various Indian Statutes. It also talk about the rights of Wife, women Rights to minor children, Rights under criminal law, labour law and women's personal rights.

Devasia V.V and Devasia Leelamma 's (1998) book- 'Women, Social Justice, and Human Rights' revolves around the positions of women in Indian society, their social conditions, their quest for social justice and women rights. It also focuses on the human rights in India pertaining to the women.

The above literature review shows that there is a research gap on the role of women empowering agencies operating independently in the state, which suggests a study on the role of women empowering agencies/ association or organization of Arunachal Pradesh in the field social upliftment of women in particular and politico economic in general. Hence the proposed study is a humble attempt to fill the gap which has been left untouched in the study of Arunachal society.

Aims of the Study

The Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) has been a key organization advocating for women's rights and empowerment in the state. Given the unique socio-cultural and legal framework of Arunachal Pradesh, where customary laws play a dominant role in shaping gender dynamics, the emergence and influence of APWWS require a comprehensive examination. This study seeks to explore the organization's ideology, structure, impact, and future relevance, while also situating its role within the broader landscape of women's welfare initiatives.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the aims and objectives of the study:

- i) To assess the role of APWWS in society, including its advocacy efforts, policy interventions, and engagement with grassroots movements.
- ii) To compare and contrast APWWS with other women's welfare organizations, identifying differences in objectives, strategies, and effectiveness.
- iii) To analyze the relevance and sustainability of APWWS in the future, considering evolving social, legal, and political contexts.

Hypothesis

i) Institutional Dynamics Hypothesis (H₃):

"The Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) emerged in the state at the expense of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women, influencing the institutional landscape of women's rights advocacy."

ii) Ideological Framework Hypothesis (H₄):

"The organizational ideology of the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) is tribal-centric, shaping its approach to gender issues within the framework of customary practices and indigenous governance structures."

Methodology

This study adopts a partly historical and primarily analytical approach to examine the role of the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) in women's emancipation. A mixed-method research design will be employed, incorporating both primary and secondary sources for data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted with the office holders of APWWS. The purpose of these interviews was twofold. First, they sought to capture what the leaders of APWWS think—that is, their perspectives on the organization's goals, challenges, and impact within the wider socio-political context. These individuals were purposively selected because of their central role in shaping the direction, activities, and strategies of the organization. As office holders, they are not only responsible for carrying out administrative and leadership duties, but also for interpreting the association's vision and translating it into everyday practice.

Second, the interviews aimed to understand how these leaders work—in other words, the practical strategies, organizational processes, and everyday practices through which APWWS pursues its objectives. This dimension focused on decision-making processes, methods of mobilizing communities, collaboration with stakeholders, negotiation with state institutions, and the internal challenges of sustaining grassroots activism.

Taken together, these interviews generated rich qualitative data that goes beyond surface-level descriptions to reveal the interplay between thought and practice in the functioning of APWWS. They provided a window into how office holders conceptualize their roles, frame their responsibilities, and translate collective visions into action on the ground. In doing so, the interviews not only complemented the questionnaire findings but also offered deeper, more nuanced insights into the dynamics of leadership, activism, and organizational culture within APWWS.

Qualitative Methodology and Approach

The qualitative component of this study was designed as an exploratory inquiry, intended to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives of women associated with the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS). While the survey data provided quantifiable insights into patterns of awareness, participation, and impact, the interviews sought to uncover the human stories behind the numbers. This approach enabled the research to move beyond statistical representation toward a richer understanding of the challenges and possibilities of women's empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the homes of participants, a deliberate choice to ensure comfort, familiarity, and openness. Conducting the discussions in domestic settings minimized the sense of formality, thereby encouraging participants to speak more freely about sensitive issues such as domestic violence, property disputes, or customary restrictions—issues that were also reflected in the quantitative findings (e.g., 44% of respondents reported facing discrimination or violence before joining APWWS). This setting also helped bridge the cultural gap often present in more institutional or public

spaces, particularly in communities where women may feel hesitant to share their perspectives in front of outsiders.

The interviews followed a semi-structured, open-ended format, guided by broad questions on awareness of APWWS, experiences with its programs, challenges posed by customary laws, economic empowerment opportunities, and perceptions of discrimination and legal rights. This format allowed participants to narrate their experiences in their own words, while still ensuring that the themes corresponded to key issues highlighted in the survey. For instance, while the questionnaire revealed that 55% of women benefited from awareness programs, interviews provided space to probe how these programs influenced their lives and whether such awareness translated into real empowerment.

Conclusion

The thematic analysis of the APWWS interviews reveals a multi-layered and dynamic picture of grassroots women's empowerment work in Arunachal Pradesh. At its core, APWWS functions as both a protector of women's rights and a facilitator of social transformation. Its activities extend beyond immediate interventions to encompass wider advocacy for cultural change, legislative reform, and long-term empowerment strategies. This dual focus positions APWWS not simply as a service provider, but as a hybrid organization bridging welfare, activism, and advocacy.

Overall, the thematic analysis suggests that APWWS represents an essential actor in the ecosystem of women's empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh, embodying both the promise and the challenges of grassroots organizing. Its work demonstrates that empowerment cannot be reduced to legal reforms alone, nor to individual counselling or training; instead, it must be seen as a complex, multi-dimensional process requiring emotional, social, economic, and political engagement. This conclusion provides not only practical insights for strengthening APWWS's operations but also theoretical contributions to debates about the nature of empowerment, resilience, and the role of civil society in promoting gender justice.

SUMMARY

This study presented and analyzed the results of both phases of the study—quantitative survey data and qualitative interview findings—with the objective of understanding the role and impact of the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) in promoting women's empowerment in the state. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed the study to capture both the measurable patterns of participation and the lived experiences of members and beneficiaries.

Consistent with prior research, the qualitative interviews enriched the interpretation of the quantitative results, offering deeper insights into why certain trends emerged in the data. For example, while survey findings indicated that a majority of women became aware of APWWS through family and friends, interviews revealed that this reliance on informal networks reflects the centrality of community trust in Arunachal's tribal society. Similarly, while only a small percentage reported significant economic improvement through APWWS programs, interviews highlighted structural barriers such as lack of follow-up,

limited market access, and socio-cultural restrictions that prevented training from translating into financial independence.

The next study will synthesize these findings by situating them within the existing body of research on women's empowerment and tribal societies. It will highlight the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, reflect on its limitations, and offer recommendations for future research and policy interventions aimed at strengthening women's rights and participation in Arunachal Pradesh.

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