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A study on issues and challenges of rural women empowerment in India

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Abstract

This paper through light and tried to analyze the status of Rural Women empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Rural Women in India. Today women's empowerment is one of the most important concerns because it is not easy to make a country great without participation of its half of the population. But women's empowerment in Indian rural society is still an illusion of reality. We have to put more efforts in this direction for building a healthy and wealthy nation. Rural Entrepreneurship can create new dimensions for providing them good economic opportunities, better standard of living that will further contribute to the overall growth of the economy. The study concludes by giving focus on governmental policies and plans, people's participation, self-help groups, and NGO's efforts. There can be various ways to empower them like access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure.

Keywords: Rural women, empowerment, employment, education, social factor, health

1. Introduction

Women empowerment generally refers to increasing the political, educational, social, spiritual or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. According to WORLD BANK empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The WORLD BANK (2001) suggested that the empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programs. In India status and condition of women depend on different variables that include geographical location rural or urban, social status (caste and class) and age, educational status, etc. Government of India implemented many policies and schemes in this direction at all levels national, state and local (Panchayat) in many sectors for health Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana which have provisions to provide cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mothers, Aayushman Bharat-PM Jan Arogya Yojana, National nutrition mission 2017-2018 to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies. For education there is Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Vidyanjali, Right To Education act, 2009 for promoting economic participation Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme is promoting community participation for empowerment of rural women, safe and secure environment try to address with the help of Criminal Law act 2013, POCSO Act, Domestic Violence Act 2005, Nirbhaya fund and political participation 73rd amendment act of 1992 provides reservation of not less than one third of the total number of seats for women, Mahila Shakti Kendras for improving digital literacy at gram panchayat level. In spite of these policies ground realities do not seems satisfactory that suggest having more effective approaches and better implementation of policies.

Review of Literature

Dyson and Moore (1983) [4] analyzed Indian Census data 1971 and secondary sources of ethnographic study. This study focused on the causes that affect women's social and economic autonomy and found that kinship patterns have a stronghold on women's autonomy.

Malhotra *et al.* (1995) [9] analyzed data of 358 districts from the Indian Census 1981 where he studied three dimensions of patriarchy, one that leads active discrimination towards

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women like sex disparity, mortality rate, second is marriage system that is a significant cause of female migration and third is economical value of women that got less for equal work.

Rao (1998) surveyed three villages and found that domestic violence hurts children's behavior and it affects children's caloric intake. Wife's earning, education along with son meta preference (more male child more respect) reduce domestic violence.

Chattopadhyaya and Duflo (2004) ^[3] surveyed women's participation in the village council in West Bengal. He analyzed that women's participation is more when the leader of the council is a woman and they like to invest more in rural infrastructure which is directly proportional to their daily needs like water, fuel, road, food, etc. Whereas men like to invest in education.

Sethuraman K. (2008) ^[12] in his research paper 'The Role Of Women's Empowerment and Domestic violence in Child growth and Under-nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India' observed women's empowerment and domestic violence, nutritional diet during maternity and normal days and children's growth in the age of 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) ^[8] focused that the health of women members of self-help groups has improved. They started to discuss about health issues among themselves and creating awareness among others also.

Allahdadi Fatemeh (2011) ^[1] in 'Women's Empowerment for Rural Development' provided a strategy for improving women's status. He analyzed that a holistic approach with community development and implementation of policies in such a way that facilitates women's all-round development can make them empower.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the awareness about rural women in India.
2. To analyze the contribution of government schemes for rural women empowerment.
3. To study the hindrances in the way of rural women empowerment.

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive and analytical. Secondary data have been used.

Provisions enshrined in The Indian Constitution

There are many avenues where women need to give equal rights. The issue of gender equality and women empowerment especially in rural India needs more concern and it is essential to discuss not only for their well being but also for the nation's development. Indian constitution has ensured gender equality:

Preamble itself talk about equality of status and opportunity or in different articles it grants equality to women

Fundamental Rights: Right to equality (article 14-18), Right to dignified life (article 21), right to elementary education (article 21A), Right against human trafficking and forced labor (Article 23).

Fundamental Duties: article 51A remind citizen that with the enjoyment of rights they also have certain duties to

perform. It make them conscious and promote a sense of discipline and commitment among the citizens.

Directive Principles of State policy: give direction to legislative and executive wing of the government to establish social and economic democracy and carry the concept of welfare state in its different articles.

Issues and Challenges Related to rural Women In Modern India

India is one of the most developing economies. It makes us proud that every year our nation comes with new records in different fields but the condition of women in our country drives our attention towards it however problems of rural women are quite different and more critical. She is on the bottom of all hierarchies. Challenges faced by women in rural area are:

Patriarchal and feudalistic attitude- India is not only a nation more of it, it's a civilization where we have thought like 'yatra nari pojyante tatra ramyante devta'. The status of women deteriorated over time due to several regions. The patriarchal mindset does not want to give space for the women. They treat as second class citizens and subordinated of the male members. They do not have an effective role in decision making and marginalized or dis-empowered. They do not allow to have higher education and mostly it considers that earning is the duty of male members of the family that further lead overload on the male members.

Low sex ratio- In India sex ratio is 940 over 1000 male children. It varies with places in north Indian villages conditions are more critical whereas in southern India it's quite better. India placed 17 out of the 23 Asia and Pacific countries by the *SDG Index* and falls in the very poor category. There is still a high rate of infanticide and female foeticide and abortion for meta soon preference. It has seen in many cases of the U.P, Haryana and Rajasthan women who deliver male children have more care, respect, and a nutritional diet, who produce more male children have more prestige which is one another reason that women self promote to have a male child.

Illiteracy- There are poor literacy rate and low level of education among the women of these areas which can be considered as another most important cause of their dismal proportion in developmental activities because of illiteracy they do not get an important place in decision making either in family or in the community at the village level. Even they are far away from their urban equals, as per the 2011 census literacy rate is 79.11% for urban females whereas it is only 57.93% for rural and digital literacy is negligible.

Unawareness and inadequate convergence of schemes- Women in rural India are unaware of their constitutional and legal rights. There are very few women who have access to government schemes and policies. Ministry of women and child development, ministry of rural development, ministry of jal shakti, ministry of social justice and empowerment and ministry of new and renewable energy are stepping with influencing work but their wholehearted efforts would not take place due to lack of awareness and lack of convergence and the aim of ministry remains scattered with the outreach of targets.

Climate change- Nature also affect rural women adversely, they mostly use conventional source of energy to cook on 'chulha' that degrade the environment and their health too. In monsoon, they usually face a problem because firewood and cow dung soak wetness from nature that make it tough to cook. The Current government of NDA (national democratic alliance) by the ministry of petroleum and natural gas on 1st May 2016 launched pradhan mantri ujjwala yojana to provide LPG connection to the rural women for addressing indoor air pollution. As per the government record, 47% of the beneficiary of these schemes belong to the weaker section of the society i.e scheduled castes/scheduled tribes.

Migration- Rate of rural to rural migration of women is highest. Except for a few parts of the country women leave their home after marriage which affect their work. Male migration also impacts the condition of rural women it increases work burden and compounds their difficulties of basic survival. In the study of Jetley (1987) ^[6] it has been seen that remittances do not substantially change their socio-economic status.

Poverty- Rural women suffer from acute poverty. They have a high dependency on agriculture along with fewer authorities and ownership that is also a cause of less economic productivity. The workforce participation of rural women is high than urban women, they are highly involved in the unorganized sector, agricultural or other allied activities but that all provide them low income.

Lack of skills- A major reason that they do not have or very limited access to good working opportunities in other sectors of the economy like trade, transport, banking, etc. Few NGOs and government programs are working in this direction.

Political Rights- Women in local panchayats have a 33% reservation which sounds good but on the ground, it seems not effective. Women usually have a position for the name sake, his work is done either by his husband or son. Pradhan Pati are more common in the panchayats that further dis-empower women.

Findings of the Study

1. Rigid, orthodoxy and feudalistic attitude degrading the lives of rural women and they feel helpless and inferior.
2. Meta son preference and treating girls as second sex or paraya dhan (others property) is a major reason for the low sex ratio. More male child more respect theory promotes case of infanticide and female foeticide.
3. low education and unawareness constitutional and legal rights or about government campaigns are a major challenge.
4. Due to poverty rural women usually use conventional source of energy and high dependency on climate make it more difficult but by the help of policies like ujjwala yojana over 6 crore LPG connection has been provided that tackle health problems of rural women and addressed environmental issue due to household smoke.
5. Vulnerability due to high dependency on the climate for agriculture or energy source. By promoting developmental activities and alternatives it can reduce.
6. Dependency only on the agriculture sector leading to rural poverty. There is a need to look beyond agriculture.

7. There should be a focus on improving skill programs, by developing skills among rural women new work opportunities can provide.
8. Political rights do not work effectively on the ground.

Recommendations

1. Until and unless the mindset will not change, the status of women will not change effectively. So there is a need to take steps from home, the family is the primary source of socialization and by changing the process of socialization change can be taken place.
2. The effective implementation of the policies for gender neutrality can improve sex ratio and social legislation like PNDT (pre-natal diagnostic techniques) can provide a better sign for New India.
3. With the governmental, it is also a social responsibility to do work for their welfare and all-round development of their lives.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women is a continuous process but in Indian society where social structure is very complex and patriarchy has a stronghold and denies equal access to opportunities. In some cases, this discrimination leads to violence against rural women. Strategy to empower has been initiated by governmental schemes and programs like National Policy for Women 2016 which is working for the rural women specifically, NGOs, self-help groups and CSR. There is a need for serious and effective implementation of all the schemes, policies and programs on the ground in an approachable manner for rural women. There should not be one size fits all approach because even within the rural boundary problems of lower caste women and upper-caste women are different. Empowerment of women either rural or urban is not discretionary but it is the time demand so the first year of the new millennium 2001 was declared as "Women Empowerment Year". Women are half of our population, empowerment of them is necessary not for the well being of the individual or family but also the economic development of the nation. For New India empowerment of women are essential.

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