

# Women Empowerment in Rural Sector

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**ABSTRACT**--Women Empowerment in rural areas has been appointed as an indispensable condition to reduce poverty in developing countries like India. Although women make up half of the Indian population, their participation in various activities is not the same as men even today. Without the participation of women in the development process, society as a whole cannot be said to develop sufficiently. In recent decades, the topic of women's empowerment in rural areas has become acute, especially, in developing countries like India. Rural women are key agents for achieving the sustainable development of India. The present study attempts to analyze the women empowerment in rural India. This paper clearly illustrates the fact that empowering the women is a key not only to the wellbeing of individuals, families and rural communities but also to overall development of the country.

**Keywords**--Education, Rural Sector, Women Empowerment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.”  
~Diane Mariechild

The world has always been a man-dominated world. In a man dominated society, where do women stand? Man has treated woman not as an equal partner but a mere slave. All men think that they have full right to control women and to kill their dreams and ambitions. It is argued that women have domestic duties to perform and should attend to the management of the household. A woman performs her duties very well but inspite of this, she has to hear many wrong words from men. The logic advanced is that the society is male dominated and only man can decide the situation and nature of work for women. Women remain confined within the four walls of the house. If the woman wants to go out for work, even then she has to perform all her household duties.

In a very few and rare cases, responsibilities are shared by male members. But times are beginning to change now. Nowadays, efforts are being made to improve the condition of women. The spread of education today has made women realize her inner potential. As a result, she has grown conscious of her rights. Now, a woman is like a kite. A kite is actually never free; it is controlled by someone who holds the string. It is the complete freedom of the women which men can never bear. Now, she is no longer exploited, helpless, compromising and self-sacrificing sort of women.

She knows her ability and is rather out to establish her identity by participating in number of fields like politics, technology, science, sports, literature, social services etc. Today a lot of people, leaders and organizations are concerned about upliftment of women. They are talking about women rights. They ask for reservation of seats for women in Parliament. Today, women have liberated themselves from the shackles of social fear and are struggling

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to earn self-respect and self-image in a society. Nowadays, women are very careful about their fundamental rights. They perform their duties well and manage their work more efficiently than the work performed by men.

Now, women can tackle a problem in a better way as compared to men. A woman can get success in both fields, that is, in family as well as in career. Today, women oppose the injustice done to them. It is absolutely true that empowerment of a women is empowerment of society.

Women empowerment spread traces its history in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century with the legalistic meaning; to invest with authority. This idea of empowerment is an offshoot of the discourse on human development and it came in prominence after 1980s. Its linkage with feminist discourse went a long way in shaping the idea of women's empowerment.

The dictionary meaning of empowerment is that "the empowerment of a person or group of people is the process of giving them power and status in a particular situation." (Collin-Dictionary)

"Empowerment is not giving people power; people already have plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificently. We define empowerment as letting this power out." (Blanchard, K.)

Women Empowerment, also called gender empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals. Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism. It refers to encouragement and development of the skills for self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group.

## **II. PROBLEMS IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL SECTOR**

### **a) *Poverty and Hunger***

One of the 8 Millennium Development Goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. It is sad that even after more than 70 years of Independence, India still has the world's largest number of poor people in a single country. Poverty affects the woman most in as much as the female members in the family are denied education, healthcare, nutritious food and good sanitation. The bottom line is that hungry people, particularly women, are systematically denied the opportunity to end their own hunger especially in rural areas. Hunger related deaths, maternal-deaths occur mostly due to lack of medical attention, particularly in rural areas and if the woman is also suffering from malnutrition, her life is at high risk.

### **b) *Child Marriage***

Small girls and in some cases, even infants in the cradle were married off in so many villages. Early marriage affected the growth and development of the children. Fixing the minimum age of marriage of men and women by law was voiced as early as the mid- 19<sup>th</sup>, despite that small girls of tender age were forced to get married.

**c) *Female Infanticide***

A girl is considered a burden by parents. Since a girl child would be going to her husband's place upon marriage, the parents did not want to waste their resources on her upbringing. Again the demand for large dowry and the huge wedding expenses caused a lot of hardships to the parents.

**d) *Women and Political Participation***

Indians wanted a nation state after independence in which women had a right to vote. Unlike the British and American women, Indian women did not face great difficulty in securing franchise. But women still constitute a mere 10% of the legislators in the Parliament and State Assemblies, even at the Panchayat, level women members face a lot of oppositions as the male members of the Panchayat do not consider them as equals. Women face opposition from the family members, often resulting in their resigning their members.

**e) *Gender Issues in India***

Gender inequity hampers the overall well-being because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio- economic and religious practices resulting in a wide disparity between the position of men and women in the society.

**f) *Educational Problems***

The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not be lessened; as long as there are differences between the education level of men and women. Inadequate education or no education is the most important factor contributing to the backwardness of our masses, especially women. The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls. It is unfortunately true of our society that children are sent to school not according to their intelligence or aptitude but according to their sex. The reasons for not sending girls to school are both economic and social. In rural areas, girls are required to help in household work. The resources of the rural poor are so limited that they do not have anything to spare for children education. If resources are available, it is the boy who is sent to school first. The management of millions of households and the upbringing of millions of children is thus, in the hands of illiterate.

**g) *Domestic Violence***

Globally, one out of every three women faces violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers or brothers and uncles in their homes. For some women, emotional abuse may be more painful than physical attacks because they effectively undermine women's security and self-confidence. Social prejudices reinforce domestic violence against women like traditional dowry, rapes etc.

#### **h) Problems of Working Women**

Working women face problems at the work place just by virtue of their being women. As it comes to remuneration, though the law proclaims equality, it is not always practiced. A woman could still bear with these problems, if she has control over the money she earns. But in most families, her salary is handed over to the father, husband or in-laws. So, the basic motive for seeking employment in order to gain economic independence is nullified in many women's case.

#### **i) Trafficking Of Women**

Trafficking in its widest sense include the exploitation of girls by pushing them into prostitution, forced-labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery and the trade in human organs. In the case of children, who have been trafficked or have become victims of child marriages, it violates their right to education, employment and self-determination.

### **III. ROLE OF EDUCATION IN EMPOWERING WOMEN**

“Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process.” ~ ICPD Programme of Action

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women in villages. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 72.14% in 2001 in which male literacy rate is 80.95% and female literacy rate is 62.84%. 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. There are so many roles of education for empowerment of women in rural area which are as follows:

#### **•Improvement in self-confidence**

Education leads to greater self-esteem and self-confidence and opens up new horizons for girls, enabling them to discover their own potential, to develop themselves fully and increase their resistance to gender discrimination.

#### **•Family**

Education helps girls and women to have a positive impact on their families: better childcare (vaccination, schooling, etc.), better nutrition, decrease in child mortality, better communication with the children and other family members. When women's education is combined with an improvement in their status, they account for over 50% of the reduction of child malnutrition. An educated woman is better equipped to increase family income and resolve family problems satisfactorily. Her family's wellbeing thus, gets a big boost.

• ***The community and society***

Education heightens women's awareness of the important role they can play in the community and society to find solutions to problems that impede development and social stability. Survival rates, schooling and community productivity increase as a result of women's education, with a corresponding decrease in mother and infant mortality rates. The community and society thus, become more prosperous.

• ***Thenation***

With the awareness of her role as citizen, an educated woman can play a more dynamic role in addressing the economic challenges faced by her country, in the areas of agricultural production, food self-sufficiency, the fight against environmental degradation, the use and conservation of water and energy. Education alone is obviously not enough to solve the world's problems, but it remains an essential factor in any development activity.

• ***Psychological/Better health***

Basic education provides girls and women with an understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, giving those choices and the power to decide over their own lives and bodies. Women's education leads directly to better reproductive health, improved family health, economic growth, for the family and for society, as well as lower rates of child mortality and malnutrition.

• ***Social/Povertyreduction***

Educating girls and women is an important step in overcoming poverty. Inequality and poverty are not inevitable. The focus on poverty reduction enables the right to education to be a powerful tool in making a change in the lives of girls and women which can be explained as follows:

1. *Educated people understand how to be a global citizen:* They know there are other countries out there. They know that the society and culture of their own country/city/town is not the only one out there and they aren't afraid of people who look or act differently than they do. They have increased awareness on all areas.

2. *It stimulates the mind:* Human brains have the capacity to learn many things, ranging from simple and tedious chores to very complex and abstract thoughts.

3. *It allows you to contribute to society better:* Educated people tend to be more aware of the problems in society and have ideas on how to fix them. Educated people tend to take up hobbies such as art, music, crafts, foreign language study, reading, etc. just to name a few, all of which can be argued to contribute to society in some way.

***Benefits of Women Empowerment***

- a) Increased self-sufficiency
- b) Increased public participation
- c) Improvement vicious circle
- d) Enhanced mobility and social participation

### ***Economic benefits of Women Empowerment on India***

Most women across the globe rely on the informal work sector for an income. If women were empowered to do more and be more, the possibility for economic growth becomes apparent. If implemented on a global scale, the inclusion of women in the formal work force can increase the economic output of a nation

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Women empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is deep rooted in many forms since thousands of years. We have to accept the fact that the things are not going to change overnight. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. Formulating laws, legislations and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times, these laws and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation, on the other hand, just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Our focus should be on the women at the root, their access and control over resources and over decision-making. Further working on the aspect of enhanced mobility and social interaction of women in the society would positively influence all round development and empowerment of women.

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