

## Status of rural women in India in the light of women empowerment

Nitin Kumar

Dept. of English PGDAV College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

### Abstract

Purpose of this paper is to study the current status of women empowerment and transformation- socially, politically and economically. This paper deals in the discussion of women's empowerment, women's role in decision making, their economic self-reliance, and the legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination. By analysing the topic - rural women empowerment shows a scenario that how women and men are differentially placed in the class system. The objective of this paper is to study the necessity of empowerment of women.

**Key words:** rural, empowerment, backwardness, unfathomable, plight

### Introduction

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”

- Jawaharlal Nehru

Empowerment of rural women has emerged as an important issue in recent times. Rural Women empowerment refers to strengthening the social, economic and educational power of women. It refers to an environment where there is no gender bias and has equal rights in community, society and workplaces. It is giving lawful power or authority to act. If women were empowered they would be able to participate in the planning, execution and implementation of developmental schemes in rural development. Empowerment leads to development, which further leads to greater empowerment. The discrepancy in the ideology and practice of the empowerment policy of women in India constitutes its continued social, economic and social backwardness. The purpose of this paper is to strengthen Rural Women in our nation by increasing their participation in society and to refine their decision-making capabilities.

The Constitution of India guarantees all women equality [Article 14], no discrimination by the State [Article 15 (1)], equal opportunities [Article 16] and equal pay for equal work [Article 39(d)]. Furthermore, it stipulates that practices derogatory to the dignity of women be renounced [Article 51 (a) (c)]. The Constitution also allows the State to make special provisions in favour of women and children [Article 15(3)] and secure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief [Article 42]. The Government of India declared 2001 the “Year of Women's Empowerment” and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women came into force in that year 2001.

it's all for the official side. But in reality, things are very different, as the living conditions of women in the rural areas show. India is men dominated democratic country. In real sense the country is democratic but only for its men, and the men are dominating none other but the women of the country. In the country where men have all the rights but women are dried up from the basic rights of their life such as education,

food and medical facilities. They are exploited in the name of custom, ritual and so called ‘sanskar’. They have to sacrifice their own dreams and wishes just for the sake of happiness of their male members of their families. The condition is worst in rural areas, where women are considered only a domestic help. For many centuries, women have been putting in unfathomable, unbearable and inadequately paid joyless drudgery to earn for their families' livelihood and provide food security to the country's 1.28 billion people. Most rural women face a pathetic plight, having to collect firewood, fetch drinking water, search fodder to feed cattle, work on their meagre land to raise crops or as labourers on other farms, take care of children, etc.

Agriculture and allied sectors in India employ 89.5 per cent of the total female labour. About 84 per cent of all women are engaged in agriculture, either as cultivators or labourers, as against 67 per cent of male workers. Women constitute about 66 per cent of the agricultural workforce. Around 48 per cent of self-employed farmers are women and 64 per cent of the informal sector workforce depending on agriculture is represented by women.

In spite of the fact that more and more women are engaged in farming as men are migrating to urban centres for work, their situation remains unsatisfactory. Not only they are invariably paid lower wages than men for the same agricultural work, they also have to work much more. In the Himalayan region, for example, a woman works 3,485 hours a year on a one-hectare farm as compared with 1,212 hours by a man and 1,064 hours by a pair of bullocks.

Despite nearly 400 million women out of the total 600 million female population depending upon crop, livestock and fish farming, forestry, agro-processing and agri-business for their livelihood, they are unable to access resources such as land, water and capital. Land ownership titles are often in a man's name. Men either take or dictate the decisions concerning farming and women have to carry them out. Men market farm produce, which gives them complete control over household finance. Without legal ownership of the land, women have no access to credit. Only 11 per cent of women in India have access to land holdings, and even they are mostly only small and marginal farmers. About 86 per cent of

female agricultural labourers and 74 per cent of female farmers are either illiterate or have education below the primary level. Average education of a female agricultural labourer was less than one year in 2004-05. An Oxfam International study in the state of Uttar Pradesh shows that 6 per cent of women owned land, less than 1 per cent participated in Government training programmes, 4 per cent had access to institutional credit and 8 per cent had control over agricultural income.

The prospects of women achieving equal ownership are already dashed at an early stage. For example, despite being officially banned by the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, child marriage is still a common practice. The worst feature of this practice has been that the child widows are condemned to a life of great agony, with their heads shaved, living in isolation, and shunned by the society. According to UNICEF's "State of World Children, 2009" report, 47 per cent of India's women aged 20 to 24 were married before the prescribed legal age of 18 years, with 56 per cent in rural areas. About 40 per cent of the world's child marriages occur in India. The Immoral Traffic [Prevention] Act was passed in 1956, yet cases of immoral trafficking of young girls and women have been increasing. Although all medical tests determining the sex of the child have been banned, India has a high masculine sex ratio. Many girls die before being born or reaching adulthood. This is attributed to the female infanticide and sex selective abortions, most of which are owing to the dowry tradition. According to a 1997 report, at least 5,000 women die each year because of dowry demand. In India, parents almost always have to pay money to their daughters' in-laws either before or at the time of their marriage.

Government has devised many programs to empower rural women in various avenues. Empowering women to participate in economic development is not only a daunting and challenging task. The various programmes for rural women empowerment such as Swashakti, Swayamsidha, Streeshakti, Balikasamrudhiyojana and another two thousand projects reveal that little has been done or achieved through these programmes for development of rural people in the country. Self help groups, micro finance groups and micro enterprises come forward to empowering women. But to empower the women very first we have to change the mindset of men towards the women. Gender equality is necessary to empower women. It is very necessary for all Indian men to understand the power of women and let them go ahead to make themselves independent and power of the family and country. Women too need to change their mindset that they are weak, anybody can cheat them or use them instead need to think that they have same power like men and can do anything better than men. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society particularly in rural areas. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society. It is important to educate the women particularly in rural areas. The need of the hour is to improve female literacy as education holds the key to development women in rural India.

1. India: Women's Empowerment, The Republic of India; Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project: Completion Evaluation, Report, 2000.
2. Pankaj Kumar Barol, Rahul Sarania. Empowerment and Educational Status: Challenges of Woman Empowerment in India, a peer reviewed Indexed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science.
3. Government of India, five year plan document, available at: <http://planningcommission.nic.in>

## References