

A Study of Socio Economic Factors Affecting the Status of Rural Women in India

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Introduction

When the chronicle of women of the 20th Century is written probably the most remarkable feature in its annals will be the history of women development. For any serious investigation about the status of Indian women, we need to go back to the earliest days of Indian civilization.

The role status and position of women has not been static through the ages but has actually ranged from that, as mentioned to have been one of freedom and a position of importance to the other extreme of considerable subservience. The women movement can be divided into the time periods such as the Vedic age, the age of the later samhitas, upnishads and the Epics, later smritis and medieval India, Modern (British) India and post Independence India.

Since the information regarding the position of women in earlier periods of the history is available on the elite sections of the society, viz, the high caste and upper strata, a very little material is obtained on the lives and positions of the large majority of women, who were not members of the elite group. The literature indicates that the position of women in Indian society during the Vedic age was much better, than what one would ordinary expect. According to Vedic literature the community as a whole showed concern and respect and they played a significant role in familial social and political life.

During the period of the later samhitas and upnishads also, women retained relative freedom. They were equal partners in marriage practices to 'Purdah' and were permitted the right to divorce and widow remarriage. From 500 B.C. to Muslim period, women of these classes not only lost their position and freedom but sank into a state of subservience. Women had gradually ceased to be useful members of society from the epic and later began to be considered unfit for Vedic studies and for performance of religious duties.

During the period of Jainism and Buddhism, women were treated with far greater respect than they were during the later Vedic period. Both these religions gave opportunities for women to participate in religious activities. Women could come out of their homes to seek religious knowledge.

Manu Smriti and Yagnavalkya Smriti, the two most well known Dharmashastras laid down codes of conduct which placed heavy restrictions on women's mobility and freedom. Evil practices such as early marriage, denial of education, ban on Widow marriage and sati relegated women to a position of total subordination.

In the days of the later samhitas, a son became a religious necessity and not only a secular one. Women were married off soon after attainment of puberty, to be the mothers of sons as soon as possible. The vedic studies were gradually abolished for them, education was neglected and early marriage came into vogue. An uneducated child wife could hardly be an equal partner for a man or an effective personality in the family or society.

Thus, throughout Indian history, however, there has been social consciousness to encourage the liberalization of attitudes to the status of women. Religious movement, like buddhism and Jainism advocated greater freedom for women than was permitted by Brahminism, The order of nuns in Buddhism and Jainism provided an alternative vocation to marriage. Thus trend of thought was continued during the Bhakti movement also and its teachings encouraged women saints like Andal , Mirabai and others.

During the early medieval period up to 1200 AD, some women of the upper strata received considerable literacy education, some of them distinguishing themselves in the field of scholarship. But this tradition diminished with the establishment of Muslim rule. The ‘Purdah’ system, a practice mainly in vogue among Muslims, was also adopted by hindu women, partly imitation and to some extent to protect their honour from foreign invaders.

At the advent of British rule, literacy among ordinary women was almost non-existent, even women of respectable families felt uneasy about being educated. During the 19th century social and religious reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy Dayanand Sanaswati, Vidya Sagar, Swami Vivekanad, Jyotiba Phule and others made efforts through legal measures and educational programmes to eradicate these evils. The greatest advantage of women’s participation in national life was that it brought them to the forefront and Indian women after independence received right that could be won only after a long struggle by women in the west.

After India became independent, the constitutes of India conferred equal right for women and men with a view to abolish gender discrimination.

The Govt. of India implemented a number of laws for liberating women from oppressive social customs. These include laws relating to divorcees inheritance equal wages, maternity benefits etc.

Factors Affecting Women Status

The Socio Economic factors which may affect the status of rural women in India, will be analysed on the basis of (i) income (ii) occupation (iii) decision making (iv) Education (v) Health and Family Survey and (vi) Religion. Besides these, political participation of women about socio cultural determinant, knowledge about Govt. welfare schemes, Government commitment and policies and programmes for the upliftment of the women will also be used for analyzing the socio economic status of women.

Justification I Need of the Study

In the context of the changes in the position of women in India, it is highly necessary to study the women as agricultural labourers and women working in other sectors for establishing equality and ameliorating a lot of rural women, because, they form an important segment of the entire labour force in Indian Agriculture. Equality of status and opportunity in the pledge made by the constitution of India. But in the case of rural women of Kanpur Dehat in particular and rural women of India in general, as will be observed during the course of this study, the facts will be analyzed and suggestions will be given, so that, there will be an improvement in the conditions of employment opportunities, educational facilities and working conditions etc. This improvement will not be seen merely on the grounds of social justice but as a basic condition for the social and economic development. So the study will have been highly needed and sufficient justification will be done in the interest of the society.

Objectives of the Study:

As the overall objective of the study is to analyse the position of women in changing perspective in reference to rural women of India in general.

Besides, the following specific objectives have also been undertaken in the present study.

1. To study the historical perspectives in reference of rural women of Indian history.
2. To assess the impact of constitutional legal and administrative provisions on the social status of women, their education and employment, particularly in rural sector during the last three decades.
3. To examine the status of women in the changing social pattern.
4. To evaluate the participation of rural women in Panchyati Raj System
5. To suggest remedial and other measures by going through the latest literature in the field of law, sociology, education, employment, politics culture and population policy etc, which would enable, women to play their active role in building up the nations and the character in addition to ensure. Impartial participation in the development process.

Research Questions

1. What is the historical perspectives of rural women since ancient to modern time?
2. What in the role of constitutional legal and administrative provision to improve the social status of women during last three decades?
3. What is the changing social pattern of these women?
4. What are the remedial and other measures in building to enable women to play their role in building up the nation?
5. What are the factors affecting the status of rural women?
6. What is the average monthly income of informers?
7. Why is the role of women declining Indian Economy?
8. How many women are engaged in organised and unorganised sectors ?
9. What is the cause of wage discrimination ?
10. What is the awareness among rural women about Govt. Programmes?
11. What is the contribution of Panchayati Raj System in upliftment of rural women?

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is a possibility of improvement in position of women in changing prospectives.
2. Women have less capacity of decision making than men.
3. There is a significant effect of social factors (Education, health, family welfare and religion in changing status of rural women.
4. Rural women have good knowledge of welfare schemas/ Plans run by Govt. and NGO's.
5. Women are taking greater interest in political activities than before.

Related Literature

1. Gidumal, JJ, Status of women in India, Ahmedabad, N, P-337, 1981, The causes for the practice of child marriage and enforced widowhood have been dealt with the study. The laws which enforced these social maladies as well as measures to stop these practices have been analysed and attitudes and ideas of important people regarding both these customs are, examined.
2. Hopkins, E.W., 'Social and military position of ruling caste in ancient India, Varanasi, Bharat Blarah, oriental publishers and book sellers, 1984. This study is based on the study of women in the epics. It gives the ideal position of women during the middle ages and enables to see the changing positon during the late period of epics.

3. Ahmed, I. "Women in politics in Indian women" This study throws light on the position of Indian women in politics, which is influenced by various factors which include demographic, social, attitudinal, educational, upbringing and such others. The researcher had interviews with women representing a cross section of the society and had also taken details of women politicians from their biographical and autobiographical writings. With help of the findings, he analyzed the actual ineffective role of women in politics in general in spite of the legal and constitutional provision of equality.
4. Sivaramayya, B. "Women's rights of inheritance in India - A comparable study of equality and protection". This study investigates the position of women in the Hindu and Muslim laws of inheritance and suggests the means of achieving equality between the sexes with respect to practice in inheritance in India.

A study of garment and textile manufacturing in Dhaka Export processing Zone in Bangladesh which provides urban employment opportunities for Rural women found that more than 90% of Female garment workers had high self-esteem, compared with 53% for female workers in non export industries of the farmer, 52% also reported that their husbands helped them with domestic work for an average of 1.9 hours per day. In addition, the female garment workers tended to delay marriage and childbirth. A survey of households conducted in two towns helps in China confirmed that the division of labour and gender-specific decision making patterns in households changed as the source and structure of household income. The role of women in decision making increased as their income increased.

Elisabeth Atangana (1998), in her study said, the network comprised largely of rural women's organizations, which played a crucial part in pursuing gender equality, sustainability, food security and other goals. Since women were crucial to rural economics, their organizations were increasingly engaged in advocating for women's empowerment and their involvement in decision making.

Sengupta, S. ed. (1999) "Women in Indian folklore Linguistic and religious study. A short survey of their social status and position."

This study deals briefly the background of the folk women of India. This study should be on the basis of caste, sex group and community to get a more exact picture of the life and living of the women folk in the family and the society.

Joshi S. (2001): "The role of women in the cultural life of the nation".

The study, historically traces women's participation in the cultural life of the country and their contribution in the field of dancing, music, painting, dramas, films and literature from ancient times to the present day. The researcher narrates her own views on the pattern of life in rural areas, which are the true repositories of our culture.

Educational Importance

India is a land of villages and 70% of the population lives in villages. The condition of working women in cities has now seemed to be changed and the women are feeling themselves more independent than ancient times. Their socio economic status has also changed but there is an urgent need to upgrade the socio economic status of rural women, working in villages, as they share a large part in the development of country. Government has also been announcing and implementing a lot of schemes for the upliftment of these rural women. So, the need of the hour is, to analyse the impact of socio economic factors that affect the status of these rural women, so that they may also lead a happy and free life and contribute a lot in the development of this country.

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