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REVIEW ARTICLE

ROLE OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SPHERES

Role of Women in Education, Political, Economic and Social Spheres

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INTRODUCTION

Indian society presents a very complex picture of women's status. There are rhetorical and historical evidences of highly empowered womanhood with simultaneous pejorative evidences of commoditized womanhood. Indian society worships the woman, as goddess of power (Durga), wealth (Lakshmi) and learning (Sarasvati). At the same time institutionalization of prostitution from historical times of "Devdasi" poses a threat to the women image of goddess (Devi). Most of the Indian deities are females. The pre-aryan Dravidian civilization in Mohan-jo-Daro and Harappa reflected an exalted image of women, prominently represented by mother goddess -).

In early vedic period, there seemed to be no gender division in hunting, warfare, defense and political activities. The girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of Brahmacharya. Another important aspect of empowered womanhood was practice of "Swayambar" (self choosing of groom). The process of deterioration of the status of women started in later Vedic period, when agricultural civilization started creating surplus and conditions of private property. This was the period of Atharva Veda. In India patriarchy started with the advent of Vedic Aryan and particularly with the advent of Sutra period (600 to 300 B.C.) where no evidence is available to generalize any notion of mass political empowerment of women.

In ancient society, the caste system with the passage of time became stereotype and rigid and criteria of birth and sex to determine the function and social status of the individual. The shift was from achievement to ascription. The social stratification process created a clear hierarchy. The concept of untouchability and impurity was deep rooted in the caste system. Manu code laid down the basic framework for a hierarchical caste structure. Even **Bhagwat Gita** places women, vaishyas and shudras in the same category. According to **Parasar Smriti** punishment for killing either a woman or a shudra is identical, **Thapar, Romila (1985)**. The decline in position of women have occurred along with the growth of a class society from the period of **Manusmriti (500 B C to 1800 A D)**, **Jayswal, Surita (1981)**. The birth of a daughter

became a source of disaster during later Vedic phase. A brief reappraisal of the position of the women in the pre independence period reveal two facts (!) a thoroughly passive attitude of the common women (2) an absence of any significant collective struggle by women (**Sangari, K and Vaid, 1989**). This legacy has come to stay in post independence Indian women. The independence period started with a general development approach to eliminate poverty because of the presence of a number of disadvantaged groups in the country including women. It was only after nearly three decades that the women's issues were brought centre stage in 1975.

A brief introspection into the history of women empowerment in India reveals a few important facts:

1. Exploitation of the women has a long history;
2. It has strong economic motivations;
3. Use of religion in creating the culture of male dominance
4. Perpetuation of the culture of male dominance and of female silence through glorification of mother;
5. Denial of social opportunity and social support to the women;
6. Institutionalizing polygamy and
7. Relative docility of women.

OVERVIEW OF THE REVIEW:

Available literature indicates that women with the framework democratic polity, laws, development policy, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plans (1974-1978) onwards has been a marked shift in approach to women's issues from welfare to development to empowerment. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th

amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

Participation of women in elections to local bodies has gone beyond expectations calling for effective steps to awareness among women. The presence and representation of women in national and local bodies as well as their presence in decision making is to be encouraged and sustained. By sharing power with men, women will get rid of themselves of the main causes of their exploitation and inferior status. They will be equal partner in the framing of all the laws and their administration and also in utilizing all available opportunities for improving their socio-economic status. Women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment in home, health, social, economic, political and educational fields would foster the pace of social development.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY:

Conference and discussions about women issues are a welcome step but what needs to be tackled is the basic perception of the society that gives rise to the aberrations. Today in all sectors of the economy women's concerns have been flagged, but the challenge lies in converting these into reality.

If India is to march into the New Millennium as a strong and prosperous nation, women must grow and have positive self-image. Nothing can be achieved without the all round development of women and their involvement in national development. As rightly observed by **Nehru**, "The status of women reflects the character of the country". So, we have to look into the gender issues with more sensitivity in the New Millennium.

Decentralization in democratic functioning and decision making has been emphasized for quite some time now as the one sure solution for a better governing of India. If in the democracy, one means the close involvement of ordinary people in the governance of the country, it necessarily has to be first available at the grass root level. To quote **shri L. C. Jain**, "If India is not governed locally, it will soon be ungovernable". Hence, the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution had been welcomed as focusing the attention of the nation on the political structure of rural India, their significance for the vulnerable section of the rural society and their participation in the operation of these structures.

Women being one of these vulnerable sections, their participation and role process have come in for considerable scrutiny. From the time of the freedom struggle, the need for popular participation in the democratic process had been accorded much importance. Gandhi and Nehru had evoked such participation as a political weapon against the British

rulers. **Gandhi** also believed strongly that grass roots of democracy is in the form of village panchayats and considered villages to be the basic political units of the future independent nation and today the one important theme on which the recent debates on Panchayati Raj Institutions. Such a participation in turn, has been dealt with at two levels, namely (i) the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions either as member or as functionaries and (ii) the substance and effectiveness of such representation. In the beginning when the Panchayati Raj was introduced in India in 1959, very few women contested or got elected.

The Balvant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) had recommended that besides the 20 members of the Panchayati Raj Samiti, there should be two women who are interested to work among men as co-opted members. A similar provision was suggested with regard to the village Panchayat. The co-option as a principle however was highly questionable both in theory and practice because the women's representation became one of tokenism and proxy and ended as a near total failure. This is why, starting as early as 1976 with the publication of the report of the committee on "Status of Women" there has been demand for the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj by reservation rather than nomination. Thus, the running theme in the debates on Panchayati Raj concerning women, from 1957 to 1989, was one of how to make more women participate in the Panchayati Raj, at its various levels. In some cases, the women have come forward, but do not prove very effective, "To quote the Task Force on Panchayati Raj as reported by Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi". In Madhya Pradesh it was pointed out that though women constitute more than half of the population in India, their participation in the decision-making process has always been negligible. This naturally will have an impact on the decision-making process as regards reservation for women.

The Panchayati Raj Act, however, has envisaged and implemented, to a considerable extent, the participation of women in power sharing. In most of the cases, women are housewives and first time entrants in the politics, most of whom are illiterate or educated up to the primary level only. Significantly, the decision to participate in the election was not of their own volition. The outcome of the election resulted in the birth of, at least in some cases, the institution of "Sarpancha-Pati or Adhyaksh-Pati" which have started functioning in many panchayats in the states. Often illiteracy or lack of adequate education is the impediment, the outcome of which is that most of the women sound vague about their role. With the help of the training programme, however, the women are being encouraged and they are gradually coming out of the social purdah. Looking at it from a different perspective, besides education and ignorance, social pressure also prevents women from assuming their responsibilities fully. Invariable, they have to struggle to establish their presence. In addition sometimes case also

plays a negative role. For Scheduled Case/Scheduled Tribes women, functioning as a panch is worse than their upper case counterparts. They feel ostracized on caste grounds. Further these women are doubly disadvantaged because of the lack of education or literacy. Hence, there is a dire need to study as to how far the women have been empowered through the Panchayati Raj system and how their education, participation and leadership qualities have paved way for their being effective in their roles.

The present study is of great importance in the present day context as there is growing realization of focusing on the women empowerment as the disadvantaged section of the society. It is a genuine attempt in this direction as it aims to study empowerment of women Panches and Sarpanches in relation to their education, participation and leadership qualities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Empowerment of women- Empowerment is the process by which powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It include both the control over the resources and ideology (includes, in addition to the extrinsic control) - a growing intrinsic capacity, greater self confidence and inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers.

Women empowerment refers to empower the women in the context of human rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, decision making, to generate the choices. Empowerment links with the awareness, knowledge about skills, health consciousness, and education of women. In the present study empowerment of women means total score obtained on the non-directive interview schedule for empowerment of women.

Education- Mahatma Gandhi defined education, as a coordinated development of body, mind and spirit and education is the key that opens the doors of good life, which is essentially a social character. **Hale (1969)** pointed out that level of education of women is an important indicator for the understanding of the present and future status of women in the society. Gandhiji remarked long back that "educating a man is educating an individual while educating a woman is educating a family". In the present study the term education refers to the level of education of women panches and sarpanches i.e. systematic instructions, schooling and all round training in the preparation in facing the life as it comes.

Participation- According to **Rao (1996)** participation is a means for political mobilisation, the preservation and utilization of indigenous knowledge, capacity-building, power redistribution, stronger beneficiary commitment, political education and healthier democracy. In the

present study participation refers to total score obtained by women panches and sarpanches on the non-directive interview schedule.

Leadership qualities- It is the activity of influencing people to cooperate towards some common goal which they come to find desirable. In the present study leadership qualities refers to total score obtained by women panches and sarpanches on the non-directive interview schedule for assessing leadership qualities of panchayat members (panches and sarpanches).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To study the profile of elected women members of Panchayats (panches and sarpanches)
2. To study the awareness of elected women members in panchayats with respect to their powers, duties and function in relation to their education
3. To study the relationship between empowerment of elected women members of panchayats and their education.
4. To study the relationship between empowerment of elected women panchayats members and their participation.
5. To study the relationship between empowerment of elected women panchayat members and their leadership qualities.
6. To study the educational differentials among different women empowerment groups of elected women panchayat members.
7. To study the participation differentials among different women empowerment groups of elected women panchayat members.
8. To study the leadership differentials among different women empowerment groups of elected women panchayat members.
9. To develop the non-directive interview schedule for women empowerment, participation and leadership qualities.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The following hypotheses are formulated.

1. There exists a significant positive relationship between education and empowerment of women elected women panchayat members.
2. There exists a significant positive relationship between participation and empowerment of women elected women panchayat members.
3. There exists a significant positive relationship between leadership qualities and empowerment of women elected women panchayat members.
4. There exists significant difference in education of elected women panchayats members at high moderate and low level of their empowerment.
5. There exists significant difference in participation of elected women panchayats members at high moderate and low level of their empowerment.
6. There exists significant difference in leadership qualities of elected women panchayats members at high moderate and low level of their empowerment.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to women panches and sarpanches of Kurukshetra, Ambala, and Yamunanagar districts of Haryana state.

PLAN AND PROCEDURE:

Methodology:

Keeping in view the nature and objectives of the present research, descriptive survey method has been considered to be an appropriate one, to describe and interpret what exists at present in terms of relationship and differences between education, participation and leadership qualities and empowerment of women panches and sarpanches.(panchayat members).

Population and Sample:

In the present study, all the women panches and sarpanches of panchayats in Haryana state will constitute the population but, it will not be possible for researcher to conduct the study on entire population. For that she has to select the sample out of population. In the present study, focus is on the empowerment of women through panchayats in relation to their education, participation and leadership qualities. The sample is selected phase wise. Out of total districts in Haryana, three districts will be selected purposively. These districts namely Kurukshetra, Ambala and Yamunanagar which are adjacent to each other will be purposively. Thereafter, all the blocks of three districts will be taken. In this way, total blocks of

the sample selected will serve the purpose of the study.

For the selection of women panches and sarpanches from the three districts, the investigator will personally visit the offices of the Block Development and Panchayat Offices (BDPO) of the sampled districts.

In any survey research, covering entire population is practically an impossible task. What is feasible and generally practiced is to study a sample representative of the population. A sample is, thus, a subset of the population under study. The aim of sampling is to choose a subset in a way that it will be adequate in size and representative of the population as a whole. It is a "miniature replica" of the population at least with respect to the characteristics under investigation if not in all aspects.

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