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**AN INVESTIGATION UPON EMPOWERMENT OF
WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:
A SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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An Investigation upon Empowerment of Women in Agricultural Education in India: A Social and Psychological Analysis

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Abstract – Empowerment in woman's development is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in her life through which she increases her ability to shape her life. The active, multi-dimensional processes enable them to realize full identity and power in all spheres of life. Rural women play a crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. However without their total intellectual and physical participation in these activities, it is not possible to achieve the goals of rural uplift.

In the present study an attempt has been made to analyze the present status of women empowerment in different caste categories. The results showed that majority of the women had medium or low level of empowerment. Further women who were illiterate/less educated were less empowered and generally belong to the scheduled caste category. In overall terms, the researchers would argue that the broad based approach is one of the best approaches to guarantee gender equity and to empower rural women, and that this approach should be considered in the formulation of rural policies and the creation and implementation of agricultural and rural development programmes and projects.

Science and technology in agriculture is of very noteworthy dimension and will strengthen the women in performing agriculture. Education is going to play a crucial role to utilize science and technology in a proficient manner. Hence there is an indispensable need to focus on women education for their empowerment. Keeping in view the past and the present status of the women in agriculture and also the growth and development of science and technology in the field of agriculture, a strategic model was designed for empowerment of women through agriculture. The strategy consists of the two ways of empowerment women in agriculture viz Employment and entrepreneurship.

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INTRODUCTION

Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities. Gender empowerment also has important ramifications for the rest of the household; empowered women have fewer children and higher child survival rates, healthier and better-fed children, and a generally greater allocation of resources to children. Development programs have aimed to empower women by increasing their control over contraceptive choices, by providing them access to credit, and through education.

Women's empowerment is particularly hard to achieve within a generation because it is driven not only by information about choices, but also by the acceptability of these choices. Communities are often governed by strict social norms, which can both be driven by and drive the choices traditionally made by women in the

village. If the social stigma associated with working outside the home or using contraceptives is prohibitive, then mere access to education or birth control may not change empowerment outcomes. Instead, providing access to women who have made different choices can expand information sets and demonstrate the outcomes associated with these choices.

As an alternative to targeting individual women, empowerment for women may be affected by combining learning and influence through community action and peer networks. Research on women's status in developing countries reports widespread inequality between the genders. Inequality between women and men takes the form of economic inequality as well as differentials in education, health care, rights, access to a number of essential resources and differences in power in all spheres of life. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, development organizations agreed that women's empowerment is

necessary for important development outcomes: “the empowerment and autonomy of women, and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status, constitute an important end in themselves and one that is essential for achieving sustainable development.” Gender equality and women’s empowerment is necessary for the improvement of women and men’s well-being, for social justice, and for the achievement of development goals.

Women’s empowerment is typically discussed in relation to political, social and economic empowerment, but the economic empowerment of women has received particular attention and is often cited as one of the most important ways to promote gender equality, reduce poverty and improve the well-being of not only women, but children and societies. Economic empowerment includes women’s participation in economic activities as well as women’s economic decision-making and power. Employment, specifically paid employment, is seen as the fundamental component of economic empowerment.

Most researchers also agree that empowerment is a process and therefore involves changes in existing power structures and a move from a state of disempowerment to empowerment. Finally, researchers agree that empowerment is multidimensional, occurring at different levels, and in different ways depending on individuals and communities and the environments in which they live.

Women’s household decision-making and freedom of movement are often used as indicators of women’s empowerment. Before the word empowerment was used, women’s autonomy, their independence, was often discussed as a goal for women’s rights and equality in society. The ability to make decisions that affect one’s life and the ability to move beyond the sphere of the home freely exemplify autonomy and were quickly adopted as basics to empowerment. Other aspects of women’s lives have become important to empowerment as the concept has expanded to encompass power in a number of spheres and forms, and women’s control over resources has become a particularly contested aspect of women’s empowerment.

Information is an essential production factor in agriculture and rural development as well (Garforth et al., 2003). Local knowledge provides much of the ideas and momentum for agricultural and other changes. Information coming from outside the area can bring fresh ideas, awareness of new opportunities. Knowledge derived from formal research, or developed in other localities, can stimulate new thinking and practices. The five external and one internal catalysts of social change identified by Figueroa et al. (2002) all have the stimulus of new information or knowledge at their core.

So it is clear that, for consistent growth in agricultural production, it is very much necessary to equipped rural female farmers as they need relevant and timely information to improve their production techniques and increase their income Sailaja and Reddy (2003) and Goldey et al. (2001). Un-fortunately women face a number of constraints on agricultural productivity. However, in many parts of the world, women in agriculture operate under greater constraints than men. Since any extension system must target particular categories of clients to meet their needs, gender specific problems of the clients need gender specific solutions: women in agriculture need special help.

On the other hand, development planners assume that information given to male farmers will be passed along to other farming members of the household. Experience indicates that agricultural knowledge acquired by men, unless they themselves are the beneficiaries, often does not trickle across effectively to women in the family. Men are less likely to pass information along to women when crops or tasks are gender-specific. According to the research study it has been proved that extension messages are effective only if they reach the client but un-fortunately these messages tend not to reach women farmers.

In India rural women who are 49.09% of our total rural population depend directly or indirectly upon agricultural production. These women play a key role in agricultural production by working with full zeal in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post-harvest and food security activities (Ahmed & Hussain, 2004). In rural areas women’s participation rate in agricultural and livestock management activities is high as compared to men. In different parts of the country their participation from province to province and city to city. Many research studies acknowledged their participation in agricultural production (Luqman et al., 2006).

Although their participation and involvement in agriculture sector is high but they are very far from agricultural extension services throughout the world. They are not supported by agricultural extension services having no agricultural information sources related to crops and livestock production, inadequate technical competency and exposure to outer world.

Only 5% of agricultural extension resources are directed to women around the world. They were generally ignored in extension programmes as reported by Colverson (1999). However the main purpose of agricultural extension is to provide farmers (of both sexes) with information that enables them to make good decision in farming, to transfer appropriate technologies from research and other sources and ultimately to eliminate poverty and hunger by improving their production and food security.

Similar situation prevails in the rural areas of India as well. They participate in agricultural activities

extensively but they are least competent in performing these activities (Sadaf, 2005). These women face many social, economic and technical constraints, which hinder their approach in gaining access to agricultural extension service. These need assistance from any public or private department, who provide them agricultural extension services and latest information related to agriculture and livestock caring and management. Keeping in view the above said facts, the present study had been designed to find out the preferences of rural women about agricultural information sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large body of literature finds that a woman's access to employment outside the house increases her household bargaining power (Rahman and Rao, 2004). The ownership of assets, in particular, is one important way through which access to employment helps empower women in developing countries. In addition, several analyses have found that access to credit programs| whether through micro-finance organizations or rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCA)| has a positive effect on female empowerment.

Studies have also found a positive link between empowerment and contraceptive use, as well as between the woman's influence on resource allocation and her family's social status. In particular, the more educated she and her father are relative to her husband, the more empowered she is. Relative physical mobility is another important determinant of autonomy, defined as degree of control over microcredit loans, since it reacts the woman's access to outside employment opportunities. A study of the determinants of female autonomy in India finds that a better-educated woman has greater bargaining power, as measured by physical mobility and say in household resource allocation, through the channel of increased information. The same study also finds culture, as measured by state fixed-effects, to significantly increase bargaining power despite controlling for religion and caste. Further evidence from India shows strong positive correlations between female education as a proxy for bargaining power, and freedom of movement and better maternal health as bargaining outcomes (Malhotra, Pande and Grown, 2003).

The empowerment of women has been widely acknowledged as an important goal in international development, but the meanings and terminologies associated with this concept vary, and methods for systematically measuring and tracking changes in levels of empowerment are not well established. A diverse body of literature has emerged regarding the conceptualization and measurement of women's empowerment and its relationships with other variables

of interest in international development. Drawing from a review of theoretical, methodological and empirical literature on empowerment from the fields of demography, sociology, anthropology, and economics, this study describes and attempts to clarify basic definitional and conceptual issues that emerge from the literature and identifies common threads in the various definitions that have been used. It then discusses some of the key issues that need to be addressed in measuring women's empowerment empirically, emphasizing points on which important progress has been made as well as identifying challenges that remain to be addressed.

S.K. Singh (2004) in his study on micro finance and empowerment of scheduled caste women in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand has found that SHGs have made scheduled caste women aware about their rights, entitlements and development programmes as well as helped them in starting income generation activities for substantial earnings and self-employment. They have also enabled them to actively participate in development programmes and in decision making process both at domestic and market fronts.

Saradha (2001) reported that the product empowerment of women in self-help groups was found to range from high and low with 35.80 and 35.00 per cent, respectively. It indicated that even though the women are psychologically empowered but their real empowerment level was low. The possible reasons for this may be the patriarchal society where the women are regarded as weaker section and the managerial competencies, decision-making power, reduction in drudgery, assessing information and resources and critical awareness of rural women were found to be low because of the lack of general media exposure, low level of education and lack of recognition.

Often, the primary focus of many agricultural development programmes that deal with markets is on raising incomes alone. The assumption underpinning this is that women with control over resources (or women that have achieved what is often called 'economic empowerment') will provide sustainable solutions to many of the development problems facing the vulnerable and the poor through using their income to support families and communities. However, empirical evidence demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case and a more holistic approach to empowerment is a better way to achieve these goals (Martinez 2006).

A pure focus on women's capacity to bring about economic change for themselves can reduce overall poverty and increase national agricultural outputs. However, women's own incomes may be another resource that they do not fully control, and even if they do control it, this control is not immediately

translated into women's social and political empowerment. If intra-household gender relations are neglected by policy makers' and development practitioners' (including WFP), efforts to support women's increased income can have adverse effects on well-being, e.g. family and child nutrition, on the overall income from other economic activities (Gallina 2010), and on women's exposure to domestic violence.

Empowerment is thus a multidimensional concept, made up of several interrelated dimensions: social, cultural, economic. Distilling these interrelated dimensions, if only for analytical purposes, is a narrow and limited approach (Moser 2007; Martinez 2006).

METHODOLOGY

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Women's tremendous role in growing the world's food supply means their participation should be central in any program to improve farming techniques or natural resource management. Yet much work in this arena involves technological approaches—mechanized farming, emphasis on cash crops over family consumption—assumed to be in the male realm. Women around the world are left to work harder to grow the crops and raise the animals that sustain their families.

DATA AND MODELS-

The data used in this study is from the Survey on the Status of Women and Fertility (SWAF) India. This micro data comes from a total of 500 households in rural and urban communities in Uttar Pradesh, India. The idea behind the selection of these communities was to, within each state, draw half from a more developed area and half from a poorly developed area. Furthermore, within each site, half were to be Muslims and half were to be Hindus and the castes were to be oversampled, thus, half to be from the numerically dominant caste, and one fourth to be from the "upper" castes and one fourth to be from the "lower" castes in the area. Districts in each state were ranked according to available development indicators. The better developed districts of UP were in the eastern part of the state and the poorly developed districts in the western part. Districts in UP that were politically unstable or dangerous were left out of the survey area.

In UP, Meerut (ranked 2 of 63) and Pratapgarh (ranked 51 of 63) were selected. Sub-districts were selected similarly and clusters of villages were selected based on the adequate representation wanted above, and villages selected randomly.

The household level surveys were directed towards married women in the ages 15-39 and included questions on the background of the woman, birth history, contraception methods, intra-family relationships, marriage history, gender issues, husband's characteristics as well as housing and possessions. Similar questions were also answered by the husband in the household.

Models - The model used in this study is a binary choice probit model that estimates marginal effects of the determinants on the different empowerment variables. When working with discrete data (yes or no, 0 or 1) a linear regression model is in most cases inappropriate. Usually, models with limited dependent variables (binary choice models) are used when it comes to analyzing micro-data, such as data on individuals and households (Verbeek, 2008). The probit model used examines the probability of a woman being empowered, that is the probability of $y_i = 1$, and the probability of a woman not being empowered, that is the probability of $y_i = 0$. Thus, the probability of a woman being empowered depends on the independent variables.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This is a study based on household data from almost 2000 households in parts of Rural and Urban Uttar Pradesh. When looking at women's empowerment, one must keep in mind the important role policies, formal institutions and the economic environment play in shaping women's capabilities in society. However, this study examines the importance of social and cultural norms, intra-household dynamics and individual characteristics in shaping women's empowerment. The driving factors of women's empowerment are multifaceted and diverse. This is one explanation to the low R^2 in the following results. Usually, goodness-of-fit measures are fairly low in discrete choice models (Verbeek, 2008). Thus, the coefficient of determination may be low even though there are relevant relationships found in the results. As mentioned in the introduction, there are limitations to using household surveys, but it is still one of the only ways of capturing the relationship between household members and the roles within a family. The results in this section show the marginal effect of the independent variables on the empowerment variables.

The results show that in UP a woman's decision-making power in the household is determined by her years of schooling, age, age at marriage, and if the husband and/or wife own their house. In both states traditional empowerment factors, such as education and income measures, seem to be the main determinants of women's ability to participate in

decision-making in the household. Surprisingly, in UP the age at marriage seems to have a negative effect on women's decision-making in the household. This may be explained by the stigma for a woman to be married at an older age or that a young wife is limited to household activities, which gives her a greater say of matters of the household, than if she had employment outside of her home.

Further studies on women's empowerment in India would need to dig deeper into gender-related constraints within the household. These have been seen to be present in Uttar Pradesh and need to be investigated further for effective policy making. The models can be improved by including more determinants to increase the coefficient of determination. Furthermore, the link between individual characteristics and community need to be examined. In addition, the determinants of husband and wife divergences in perspectives of women's empowerment would be needed to achieve micro-level social change within the household. Not all determinants are easy to explain, which makes it more important with knowledge of local customs, culture and community characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed poor socioeconomic conditions of the respondents. The majority of respondents belonged to medium category of Autonomy vs. Dependency followed by low and high categories of Autonomy vs.

Dependency, respectively. The majority of the respondents of all three caste categories had medium level of Self-esteem vs. Self-depreciation followed by low level and high level of Self-esteem vs. Self-depreciation, respectively. The respondents were found in medium category followed by low category in relation to Reflective vs. Repetitive behavior in all three caste categories. The empowerment of women decreases toward low level from medium level.

Moreover, women who were illiterate/less educated were less empowered. Education plays an important role in bringing about awareness on women's rights. Education and employment are better described as "enabling factors" or "sources of empowerment". Hence, the education should be major motive for holistic empowerment of rural women.

The findings in this thesis support policies which have been used to empower women in India, e.g. promoting education and delaying age at marriage (with an exception of decision-making in the household in Uttar Pradesh). Education of both men and women is a highly relevant investment in regard to women's empowerment.

This indicates further that in order to deal with intra-household discrimination the community must change. Since gender relations are shaped by social and cultural norms, which are captured by community level differences, policy-making directed towards empowering women should involve social change. Due to the great impact of communities on women's domestic situation, changing societies' gender systems can help empower women. This is in line with previous studies showing that institutional changes are essential for the empowerment of women and girls.

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