

HINDRANCES IN THE PATH TO EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

Sangeeta Rai¹ & Rashmi Singh²

Women constitute nearly 50% of the total population in India and play an important role in society. Women perform dual responsibility. They perform household works besides working outside. Rural women actively participate in many agricultural and animal husbandry related activities, besides their usual role of caring for children and home keeping. They have a multi-faceted role to play. They are the custodians of future generation. In their tasks as mothers who bear and rear the children they play a very vital role in the development of the nation. In the Childs early socialisation mother plays a very important role. In the poorer family, Women are a major contributor to the survival of the family. In many cases, it was found that while the men wasted their earnings on gambling and drinks, women bear the economic burden of the family. Yet, women are not regarded as the heads of the household. Women are usually the invisible workers whose contribution is not fully recognised. Even, women themselves hide that they are major earners for the family.

Socio-economic practices inherited from the past stand in the way of woman's emancipation. Overwhelming a large majority of our people are extremely poor, illiterate and easily prone to superstitions, and religious prejudices. These weaknesses instead of being removed are often exploited by ruling elites and other vested interests. If anyone dare to stand up to these exploitations faces violence and equally brutal suppression.

Many female children are killed even before they acquire the age of viability in the mothers' womb. Process of discrimination

starts even before the birth of girl child and goes throughout her life. Girls in rural areas face problems in attending schools, especially if these are not situated near their home. As most rural girls have to assist in the household chores, the timings of schools are not always convenient as such they are compelled to drop-out from the schools. Discriminations are done in allocating resources for girls during childhood.

There is a guarantee of equality before law but it is meaningful to only to those who can legally enforce them. This brings us to the realities prevailing in the country. Many women are not even aware if these legal rights and are exposed to exploitation and oppression. Those who are aware of these rights are hesitant to get involved in legal hassles as this is an expensive affair and everybody cannot dream to have recourse to them. The ethos and problems of India must first be understood before an acceptable standard of right performance assessment is evolved.

To segregate the problems or needs of women without taking the man into account would not be in right perspectives. In fact, certain attitudes or behavioural pattern of the men give rise to problems or inadequacies of the women. Doing work as competently as their male colleagues, they are often denied the top positions of power and authority. The prevailing attitude towards women is still that of self-sacrificing, and self-effacing, devoted image of women.

Patriarchal attitudes and behavioural norms are etched deeply not only in the minds of men but also in the mindset of women themselves

1. Head, Dept. of Pol. Sc., R.B.S. College, Agra. 2. Scientist (Ag. Ext.), Division of Agril. Ext. IARI, New Delhi.

that hinders their progress. Even women with liberal education cast themselves in typical social role models as an accepted norm and attempt to live up to the age-old image of subjugation.

Women form the backbone of agriculture comprising the majority of agricultural labourers in India. More than 90% of rural women in India are unskilled. This restricts them to low paid occupations. In agricultural sector 70- 80% field work and post-harvest tasks are chiefly their responsibility. They do about 80% animal husbandry activities. Many rural development programmes, which include new methods of cultivation and are designed to transfer technology to the rural people, do not include women, though women are the main backbone of the agricultural activities in the rural areas.

Women participation in the government is minimal. They are only remembered at the time of election. There are many women who are not even aware of their political rights. As such the first requirement is that they should be made aware of their rights. Once that awareness is there, then it will be easier for women to chalk their own path to progress in society with the full knowledge that they can lean upon the legal provisions of the constitution and get relief.

The role of education as a catalyst or agent of social change has been well recognised. As such emphasis should be laid on educating women and providing adequate facilities for their education. Education determines the level of aspirations, adoption of technology, productivity, and efficiency, which are essential constituents of the process of development. At least basic knowledge about nutrition, hygiene, health care, and management of finances should be imparted to them.

A concentrated effort should be made to make women economic independent. Entrepreneurial skills should be developed especially among rural women for small business ventures, and other household industries. Rural women share the economic burden of the family. Thus, an honest effort should be made in educating, training skills, generating awareness, imbibing confidence among them.

Health care facilities for rural women are substandard and quite inadequate. Voluntary organisation, social workers can play a key role in helping the women and improve their conditions.

Women are insecure in our society as such they prefer to avert the danger of exposing herself to aggression or hostility of any kind directed against them. Even though women are aware of their rights and position they do not raise their voice against oppression. They think that challenging the age-old societal pattern and norms would jeopardize her position in the family and society. They impose a powerful self-censorship in order to avoid threats to family relationship, marriage relationship, and harmonious relationship that are essential to economic production and family life.

In a democratic society, public awareness, activism and alertness are the perhaps most effective guarantees of rights. We have to have a caring society, a sensitive society, and a society that does not pay lip service only to women's rights but sees to it that they are available to them. There is a need to generate awareness to build healthy attitudes towards women between both men and women. The need is to consider women as equal partners in the decision making in the home, workplace, community, and nation.