

Challenges Faced by Women in Rural India

Priyadarshini.R

Abstract— Women are an integral part of the society contributing for social and economic development of individuals, families and the nation. Since independence, efforts are being taken by the government and responsible bodies for the development of women in India. Equality, Respect, dignity and security are the fundamental to every woman in a democratic country like India. Through various reforms and enactment of policies, these fundamental expectations of women are being taken care by the government. But then, the family and society plays a vital role in assuring these fundamental rights are upheld. From birth, women face challenges as they pass through the various stages in their lifecycle such as access to education, employment, early marriage, dowry, domestic violence and many more. Another critical point is that, the challenges for women and their wellbeing are more in rural areas. The various types of incidents with varied magnitude inflicting women are being exposed through media reports are alarming and calls for immediate action. This research article brings out the persisting stigma with regard to women in the country, particularly in the rural areas. A fact that cannot be ignored is that 70% of India's population is made up of rural areas and nearly 50% of them are women.

Index Terms— Rural women, Challenges faced by women

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural India is the soul of India. The major population of India resides in rural parts, comprising of villages and hamlets and houses in farms scattered in the region. Some of these rural areas are even neglected by the government and their missions. Even though, rural areas are naturally beautiful and picturesque landscape, the other side of the area is not known to many. Challenges faced by people living in rural areas are many and are continuing to exist. Access to education, health, housing and employment are yet to be addressed.

Issues such as gender discrimination, early marriage, dowry harassment, domestic violence, crime against women and children are on an increase, and women are the victims. Women in rural areas face more challenges when compared to those living in urban. Rural women face inequality at much higher rates, and in all spheres of life. Urban women, particularly educated urban women enjoy relatively higher access to economic opportunities, health and education, and experience less domestic violence.

India's progress towards gender equality, measured by its

position on rankings such as the Gender Development Index has been disappointing, according to the Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011 in which India ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled.

II. CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL WOMEN

Women in rural areas are portrayed as 'homemakers'. The definition of homemaker is very narrow, it refers to activities such performing day to day household tasks, taking care of children, attending funerals and share the workload of their spouse. Among the many challenges faced by women in rural areas, the following are few critical ones predominantly found across the country:

Poor access to education- It is believed that, if one male child is literate, he alone is benefitted whereas, if one girl child is educated, the whole family is benefited. It is told, "You educate a man; you educate a man, you educate women; you educate a generation..."

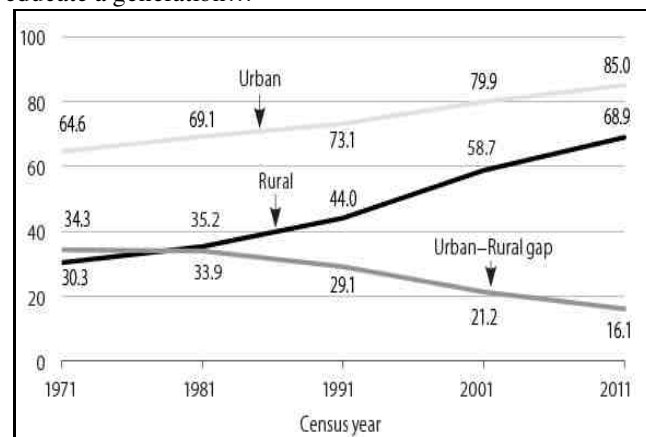


Fig.1: Literacy Rate in India- Urban – Rural Gap

Source: Census of India 2011

Among the literate women in India, only 59 percent of them have primary education or even lesser.

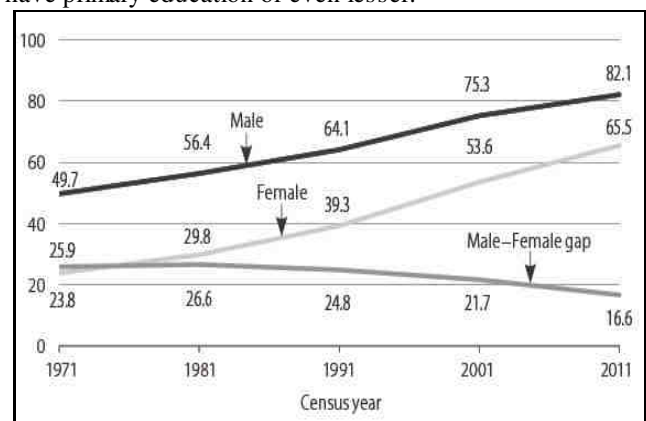


Fig.1: Literacy Rate in India- Male – Female Gap

Source: Census of India 2011

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Priyadarshini.R, B.Sc. (Food Service Management & Dietetics), Women's Christian College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, (Email: graceravivarma1993@gmail.com)

This level of education in the present day is not sufficient to meaningfully improve the status of women, no matter where they hail from, urban or rural. A major observation among girls in rural areas is that, although they have enrolled at the beginning of the year, many of them dropped out during the year or years later. It is reported that around 45 percent of girls dropped out of school between grades 1 and 5. Girls are often taken out of school to share family responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings and to support parents in domestic work. Girls are also likely to be taken out of school, when they reach puberty because of the high premium placed on virginity. The data on school attendance shows the proportion of girls attending school decreases with age.

Gender discrimination- Gender Discrimination is rampant in many villages of India especially in the states of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Gender discrimination implies giving a superior position to men due to the prevailing mindset of Patriarchal society in India. Due to gender discrimination, women are kept confined to their households and not allowed to participate in any activities like employment, entrepreneurship, elections, and professional discussions or represent any organization or the society, or even speak in public. Survey data from across the developing regions suggests that men often exert a high degree of control over women's mobility. Surveys conducted in rural areas in India in the recent past reported that a major portion of women from rural areas could not visit their family members or relatives living outside their household at their discretion, instead they need to seek for permission from their spouse for such visits. Household decisions are often taken by men when compared to women, especially in rural areas. Men are showcased as more knowledgeable, experienced and opinion leaders by virtue of their gender, and continues to be so.

Child marriage- Though Child Marriage has been declared illegal in India according to law, the reality is far from good. According to the National Statistical Organization, around 47% of women in India are married before the age of 18 years. This problem is graver in villages due to the prevalent illiteracy and lack of awareness among the women. This also has continued as a never-ending tradition in India. According to UNCIEF, India has the highest absolute number of child brides in the world, reported to be 15,509,000 persons. While comparing the census data taken during 2011 in India with other countries, India ranked 6th among the top 10 countries with regard to child marriages. Though several studies agree on the declining trend of child marriages globally, in India, the pace of decline is slow and there is still a high proportion of child marriages happening. The median age of marriage for women increased from 18.2 (Census, 2001) to 19.2 years (Census, 2011), and this seems to be a thin difference, looking at the gravity of the issue.

Domestic violence- Women in rural India are sometimes so ill-treated that they become victims of domestic violence every day in their homes. Alcoholism of the spouses sometimes even worsens the situation. She is treated like a slave and her upbringing stops her from questioning her spouse or in-laws. Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, economic and sexual abuse. Domestic violence can be subtle,

coercive or violent. In India, 70% of women are victims of domestic violence. 38% of Indian men admit they have physically abused their partners.

Dowry Harassment- Women are given inferior status because they are considered to be a burden for the parents. This is mainly due to the dowry practice that is rampant in the rural parts of India. There is not a denial of the fact that dowry as the practice even exists in Urban and semi-urban regions but the women in urban areas are educated and alert enough to tackle the issue which is not the case for rural Indian women. India reports the highest total number of dowry deaths with 8,391 such deaths reported in 2010, meaning there are 1.4 deaths per 100,000 women. Female dowry deaths account for 40 to 50 percent of all female homicides recorded annually in India, representing a stable trend over the period 1999 to 2016

Unemployment- Work participation drops sharply for women with primary and secondary education and rises only with the college level education. Non-availability of white collar jobs, disproportionate long hours of working and lesser job security narrow down the job opportunities for educated women in India. NSSO data for 25-to-59-year-old workers in 2011-12 show that among farmers, farm labourers and service workers, nearly one-third are women, while the proportion of women among professionals, managers and clerical workers is only about 15%. While men with lesser levels of educational qualifications (Class 10 or 12 education) can find jobs as mechanics, drivers, sales representatives, postmen and appliance repairmen, few of these opportunities are available to women. Both social prejudices and working conditions which are mostly centred around the male workforce contribute to the inhospitable environment for women, who often find it difficult to adjust to male-centric working conditions.

Lack of proper sanitation- Women in rural India are still facing the problem of securing basic sanitation facilities. They are the victims of open defecation and also the diseases which are caused by it. There is no proper maintenance of public toilets. Women are sometimes even prohibited from using the public toilets which are constructed by the government. The census of 2011 shows that nearly half the population of India do not have toilet facility at their home. Only 46.9% of the 246.6 million households have lavatories while 49.8% defecate in the open. The remaining 3.2% use public toilets. Only 31.9% households in rural India have access to sanitation

III. SAFEGUARD MEASURES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

In New Delhi over five years to 2017, water borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, diarrhea and viral hepatitis caused 10,738 deaths. Diarrhoea remained the leading killer, causing about 60 percent of all deaths, according to report by Jai Prakash Nadda, Minister for Health and Family Welfare on April 6, 2018. India loses 73 million working days due to water borne disease. India registered 69.14 million cases – or as many people as in United Kingdom – of four water borne diseases over five years to 2017, government data shows. Diarrhoea caused 6,514 deaths, the most of water-borne diseases in India, over five years to 2017. Other killers were viral hepatitis (2,143), typhoid (2,061) and cholera (20).

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, recorded the most diarrhoeal deaths--22.21% of deaths nationwide--over five years to 2017, according to the data, followed by West Bengal (14.33%), Assam (12.03%), Odisha (10.63%) and Madhya Pradesh (7.24%). About 65 million people have been suffering from fluorosis, a crippling disease due to high amount of fluoride. The death toll in Bangladesh's floods during July 2020 increased to 119, and 10,684 others injured in the disaster that has affected 21 of the country's 64 districts. Of the total deaths, 96 drowned while 13 died of snakebites, it said, adding that around 5,000 people in flood-hit areas are suffering from diarrhea and other water-borne diseases. Environmental experts have warned of long-term adverse impact due to the flooding in Bangladesh, a delta-nation crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers. The situation has become more severe due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. According to a recent UN report, millions of people in India, Bangladesh and Nepal have been affected by the widespread flooding. Amongst them, over four million children need urgent life-saving support.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Swachh Bharat Mission- The house hold toilet coverage where across India it's been successful but in some states where the coverage is low like Bihar, Punjab, Manipur, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, it is important to speed up the cover these states. Construction of toilet in rural areas is yet to be achieved so as to fulfill the national goal.

National water policy- The important action is to increase the rain water harvesting in all houses. Even though this initiative has been taken up by many states, there exist problems of rainwater harvesting pathways being connected with drainage of house. Therefore, an effective monitoring system is required so as to ensure drainage flows independent from rain water flow.

National urban health mission- It's important to confirm that every rural areas consists of a health consultant. Doctors play a vital role where numbers of hospitals are less. It is very important to operate medical camps frequently in areas where permanent hospitals are yet to be established. There is an emergent need for increasing the number of hospitals in rural areas, as more people live there. This shall contain the number of morbidity and without any delay in treatment.

Reforms are been initiated by the government from time to time whereas, a majority of people are not aware of the policies implemented and are not availing the benefits of the policies. Therefore, the government must create awareness from time to time among rural population about the need for hygiene and its impact on health.

V. CONCLUSION

Hygiene plays a very important role in maintaining health of every individual and the society. The impact of various kinds of diseases are high in developing and least developed countries and, health issues faced by rural people in these countries are high. The sufferings and casualty due to Air borne and water borne disease are on an increase, especially in

rural parts due to unhygienic practices of people. This could be contained through policy initiatives and subsequent awareness programs. Thus, morbidity and mortality rate could be controlled. Also, the government spending on health facilities and infrastructure shall be enhanced so as to cater to the growing population on India.

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