Status and Empowerment of Minority Women: A Sociological Study

Richa Singh
Research Scholar, Glocal School of Education,
Glocal University, Saharanpur, India
richa_rs@gmail.com

Dr Rashmi Singh
Research Guide, Glocal School of Education,
Glocal University, Saharanpur, India

ABSTRACT

The well-being of people is unquestionably the ultimate object of all development efforts of a country and the basic quest of human endeavor is always to seek a better quality of life. The quality of life of citizens of a nation can be effectively improved only by raising the standards of living of the people on the street and in rural areas. Social empowerment in general and women empowerment in particular is very fundamental in achieving this goal. The institution of democracy provides a strong foundation for harmonizing social and economic objectives. Thus, within the broad democratic framework there are great opportunities for synergizing women and economic growth Programmes to deliver better quality of life in the shortest possible span of time.

Keywords

Empowerment, Minority, Women, Social empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, the plight of Muslim women is not better than that of women belonging to other social groups. Despite the honor and reverence accorded to women as deities in religion and mythology and tribute paid to them as personified a historical monuments, the ground realities have a very different tale to tell. In a patriarchal society like India, there exists the unfounded belief that only man is the bread-earner of the family, consequently, the male child gets the best of the limited facilities and resources within the family[1]. The girl child runs the risk of being aborted through the misuse of modern technique of amniocentesis. She is deprived of quality school education because she has to take care of siblings at home and since she is to be married off soon, investing in her education is considered wasteful and hence a liability. More than half a century of Independence, the efforts of striving for a better status for women have not yielded satisfactory results in India. Indian women are at the crossroads of their denting [3]. There is a great upsurge in consciousness about their rights among all sections and class of society in all regions of the country. There has been a tremendous increase in the developmental activities for women since the 1980s with a great gap forward in the 1990s. Interestingly, Muslim women in India have been playing a subordinate role though Constitution of India establishes a secular state and eliminates discrimination on ground of race, religion, sex etc. Muslim women continue to be victims of traditional social structure of the community. It is evident from the fact that educational development among the Muslim women is very poor and due to this their economic participation is quite low. Muslim women are also not enjoying the equal status in the society due to cultural and religious traditions, norms and values of the society [2, 4]. The provision of divorce, polygamy, mehr has placed women in a lower status.

Due to the impact of modernization, westernization, globalization, democracy, socio-economic changes, legal enactment pertaining to Muslim women, society is advancing towards gender just and equates systems, giving the way to empowerment and advancement of Muslim women in India. Women studies are in vogue. For about three decades women belonging to various sections and communities are being studied from socio-economic perspectives. The main focus has been on the changing aspect of women, their place in society and their role. Muslim women in general are considered to be relatively more conservative due to the prevailing socio-cultural environment. However, the attitude of Muslim women is changing and their participation in development process is gradually increasing [5, 6]. It is because of the increased level of education, awareness and government and non-government organization's intervention Programmes which resulted the positive social change and particularly in Muslim concentrated areas. Muslim women are also conscious about their roles in culturally prescribed pattern of behaviour. However in India, the social structure of Muslim women seems to be considered of the core of the traditional cultural setup. With interplay of a number of exogenous forces which have affected its traditional cultural setup and internal indigenous developments some changes can be seen in the Muslim society. More precisely, modern education, secularization and increased communication have let to the genesis of a relatively open and progressive Muslim social structure. As a result, the Muslim women have begun their striving and to look at their problems from the rational and the scientific point of view. A hitherto unforeseen change has also evolved in a values and attitudes of the Muslim women towards men and their sexual relationship [7]. The dominant values of pre-modern societies like dominance; dependence, segregation, servility, obedience and loyalty are also being replaced by independence, individuality, equality and companionship [8].

2. RELEVANCE OF PRESENT STUDY

Religious profile of the populace is an important socio-cultural and demographic feature noticeable from the first Census in 1872 till now. There are six major religions, e.g. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist and Sikh; census also collected data on other religious faiths and denominations. Some of the religious faiths and persuasions are variants or varied manifestation of the major religious groups. The huge list of these other religions were checked, edited, classified and processed to get the precise picture of the data. In the past information on religion as provided in Census was very limited but in the last Census 2001, a number of cross-tabulations were made available. The data showing distribution of religious groups in 2001 provide is available at State and district levels down to sub-divisions and towns. Cross-

tabulation of different religious groups by literacy, classification of workers and non-workers provided new insights [9]. These are additional information compared to those published data of past Censuses. Of the total population of India in 2001, 80.5 per cent are Hindus while Muslims account for 13.4 percent and Christians 2.3percent respectively of the total population. In absolute numbers, approximately 828 million are Hindus while Muslims are around 138million out of India's total population of approximately 1,029 million. Sikhs account for1.9 per cent of the total population. The proportion of Buddhists, Jains and other religions are 0.8 per cent, 0.4 per cent and 0.6per cent respectively. Sex ratio which is the number of females per one thousand males is 933 for all the religious groups at the national level. Hindus and Sikhs are below the national average while the rest are above the average. The highest sex ratio is seen among\Christians with 1009 females while the lowest is among Sikhs (893). Constituting the largest segment of the population, the Hindus have a sex ratio of 931 while Muslims, the second largest religious community have 936[10, 11].

The status of women in the country, particularly those from the disadvantaged sections of the society, is unfavorable. Empowerment of women per se is not only essential for equity, but constitutes a critical element in our fight for poverty reduction, economic growth and strengthening of civil society. A report of the High Level Committee on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India , popularly known as the Sachar Committee Report had highlighted the fact that India's largest minority group, the Muslim have been left out of the development trajectory and within this group Muslim women are doubly disadvantaged. With this in mind, the Ministry of Women & Child Development) formulated a scheme of "Leadership development for Life, Livelihood and Civic Empowerment of Minority Women" in 2007-08 for ensuring that the benefits of growth reach the deprived women among the minority communities[12]. The Ministry of Minority Affairs has suitably recast the scheme and renamed it as "Scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women". The scheme has further undergone revision for faster implementation. The minority communities as accepted by the Ministry of Minority Affairs are Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis), which have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992[13]. Eligible women of these minority communities would be the target group. However, to further strengthen the mosaic of plurality in the society and bring about solidarity and unity through their own efforts to improve their lot, the scheme permits a mix of women from non-minority communities not exceeding 25 percent of a project proposal. The objective of the scheme for leadership development of minority women, including their neighbours from other communities living in the same village/locality, is to empower and instill confidence in women, by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks and other institutions at all levels. The scheme is envisaged to reach out to women through non-governmental and governmental organizations/ institutions, and Central and State Government training institutes including universities and institutes of higher learning by providing financial assistance for conducting leadership development trainings to empower and embolden women [14].

Minority women in India are potential catalysts. Their empowerment could be a crucial step in modernization of the community. Their present status reflects the dominance of traditional conservative attitudes. Minority women today are somewhat in an inferior to that of other Indian women in terms of their socio-economic status. Government, may no doubt play an important role in empowering minority women, however, initiatives should come from the community itself. Again, the mindset of the community is also necessarily to be changed to accept the empowerment of minority women, their enhanced role and active-participation in developmental process. Against this view point the present study is proposed to carry out to assess the socio-economic status of minority women in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar [1, 4].

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women constitute half of the segment of population in India and cannot be afforded to keep out of the mainstream. Secondly, women are vital and productive workers in India's national economy, and make 1/3rd of the labour force. Thirdly, the poorer the family, the greater is the dependence on women's economic productivity. Fourthly, there is a significant gap between women's potential and actual productivity. Therefore, women will gain proportionally more if investment allocation and development efforts are shifted in their favour. Fifthly, women's earnings have a positive correlation with children's health, nutritional levels and education (Singh and Singh, 2004). At the turn of 19th century, industrial revolution brought about radical changes in societies the world over, particularly in the societies which were rooted in the agriculture. One of the radical changes was the removal of manufacture from the households to the factories and shops. The work done at home offered lifelong educational, socialization, communication and residential benefits to the family members. It kept the unemployment and crime rate low [12, 15].

The industrial revolution took away this responsibility from women, brought about a rural urban dichotomy particular in aggregation society and created demand for some other education agent, outside homes. It resulted in greater segregation and discrimination within all sectors, a majority of women lacking productive and technical skills, science and technology, and extension and training Programmes provided primarily to men as women are conceived only as consumers of the industrial revolution (Dhawan, 1995). At the turn of 19th century, communication revolution, which is technology intensive, has brought about another radical transformation again at the home front. Globalization and economic liberalization followed by structural adjustment Programmes forced women to involve in economic activities as more salaries are needed just to maintain a house (Dawn & Singh, 1991)[11,14].

Thus, gender equality has become a core prerequisite for sustainable and equitable economic growth (National Alliance of Women, 2008). Gender equality and women empowerment are the key terms that defined and determined the direction of diverse discourses on women, nationally and globally. The Beijing conference was the most significant milestone in journey towards ensuring gender equality and enriching pragmatic insights into the issues concerning women empowerment (Singh & Srivastava, 2001). The oppression of girls and women can include the preference for sons over daughters, limited personnel and professional choices for girls and women, the denial of basic human rights and outright gender based violence (UNICEF, 2007)[7,9,13].

Indian society is an agglomeration of diverse cultures. There are numerous castes, tribes and ethnic and religious groups. "It is, therefore, Indian society is called a multicultural society. Every

group has its own cultural specialty" (Linton 1936). We find caster cultural, tribal cultural, linguistic cultural, ethnic cultures and regional cultures etc. Every religious group has its own historical tradition and custom. Interestingly, among the Muslim, religion regulates the sacred and the secular practices. The Muslim, by and large, accepts their religion as unalterable and resists any major innovation. Singh (1993) while discussion the "Modernization of Indian Tradition" points out that Islamic tradition is exogenous source of charge of Indian tradition but it has become a part of Indian tradition and has greatly influence the revolution and the growth of Indian tradition in medieval times. In defining the role and status of Modern Muslim women we have to take into account their status, which has been constrained by religion for a long time as started earlier. We have also to consider the different internal and external forces which tend to bring about a new socio-psychological orientation in their outlook. In other words, a modern Muslim woman is to be regarded as a fusion of many forces. (Latif, 1983). In India, Parsis maintained some sort of social isolation by practicing endogamy and not accepting any new converts to their faith (Visaria, 1974; Alexrod, 1980) [12, 15].

However, they have selectively adapted themselves to social milieu of Gujarat by accepting the language and the dress of the region (Visaria, 1974). The status of minority women is reported worse than the status of women belonging to general communities and castes. Among the minority communities, the status of Muslim women has been reported low as compared to status of women belonging to other minority communities. It is to be noted that traditions, values and social system have direct bearing on the status of women belonging to minority communities. Poverty and backwardness has been reported high among Muslim, Sikh and Christians while Parsis, Jain and Buddhists are comparatively better off [7, 9].

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The proposed study will have the following main objectives:

- To review the status of women and particularly minority women in India;
- To analyze the impact of modern education, secularization, modernization, urbanization on minority women on their attitude and behaviour;
- To study the impact of development and empowerment intervention Programmes on socio-economic status of minority women in India;
- To review government policies, Programmes and development projects for development, welfare and empowerment of women and particularly minority women in India;
- To analyses changing perception of minority women about institutions and socio-cultural structures such as marriage divorce, maintenance, property rights, acceptance of family planning measures, employment, participation in decision-making process and freedom to work independently, and social relations;
- To assess the impact of socio-economic development Programmes and projects on minority women;
- To analyze the participation of minority women in development Programmes, schemes and projects and also to examine the perception of minority women regarding personal laws and socio cultural value system:
- To examine problems, constraints and challenges being faced by

minority women in their educational, social, economic and cultural empowerment and development:
- To suggest policy measures for effective administration of development Programmes and projects aimed at social empowerment, women's participation in development process and governance.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will be empirical in nature and will be based mainly on primary data collected through field survey. Besides survey and analysis of primary data, secondary data and pertinent literature will be compiled from published and documented sources for getting insights on the topic of the research.

6. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Gender discrimination has been one of the features of pre-independence India. In view of this perhaps the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, and fundamental duties and directives principles. The Constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt measures of welfare, development and empowerment. Importantly, laws development policies, plans and Programmes have been launched for women's advancement in different spheres .A close look at the emerging trends unmistakably points out the stark reality a development programmers, schemes and projects have been passed women. With the implementation and execution of women specific Programmes, schemes and projects, women's participation in development process could ensure, however, the desired impact of these Programmes and schemes could not be achieved, leaving a wide scope of improvement [12].

Women empowerment is the key term that defines and determines the direction of diverse discourses on women. The Beijing Conference (1995) was the most significant milestone in the journey towards ensuring gender equality and enriching pragmatic insights into issues concerning women's empowerment. Moreover, the New Women Policy (2001), Government of India has emphasized on action plan for empowerment of women. Significantly, the series of world and national conferences on women over the last two decades have contributed to the progressive strengthening of legal, economic, social and political dimensions of gender equality through women empowerment [11]. The dynamics of gender disparity and women's abuse and exploitation have attracted the attention of policy makers to reconsider the strategies, approaches and Programmes for women's steady march towards their all-round development. Importantly, a lot of progress has been made all over the country towards the goal of equality, development and empowerment, at the levels of awareness, advocacy, and formulation of policies, Programmes and plans and enactment of laws. Moreover, government, non-government, private and voluntary sectors have have done much significant work to operationalize these. It is high time that vigorous efforts are made at the level of plan formulation and implementing these policies, programmes and plans into action and making women's empowerment a reality [7]. Educational empowerment of women holds the key to their economic and political empowerment. It is the first step towards ensuring equality, justice, human rights concerns and entitlements. Importantly, economic empowerment of women is a necessary condition for enabling women to seek justice and equality. Without economic strength women cannot be able to exercise their rights and entitlements [9]. Therefore, it

is necessary to seek participation of women as equal partners with men in all fields of work, equal access to employment, equal opportunities for work related training and full protection of women at work place. Economic empowerment of women including reduction of female poverty requires Programmes that focus on identifying, developing and promoting alternative approaches to increase women's access to and control over the means of making a living on a sustainable and long term basis. Moreover, economic empowerment necessitates supporting their existing livelihood, widening their choices and building their capacity to take advantage of new economic opportunities. Economic empowerment strategies advocate that the government undertakes legislative measures to speed up women's participation in economic life, including the rights of equality in property ownership and inheritance and access to credit, financial services and assistance in entrepreneurial development [10, 12].

7. CONCLUSION

There is imperative need to introduce a separate scheme for the empowerment of minority women rather than emphasizing on women leadership development as gender mainstreaming is more important rather than creating leaders among minority communities. The review of literature simply demonstrates that there is paucity of literature, empirical data and research findings related to status and empowerment of minority women in India and particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Thus the proposed study will be of immense importance for policy implications and operational view point as Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India has already launched the Scheme of Women Leadership Development for Minority Communities. The study will be also useful for evolving action plan for empowerment of women belonging to minority communities in India and particularly in selected states.

REFERENCES

[1] Agarwal, Rashmi & Rao, B.V.L.N. (2004), Gender Issues: A Road Map to Empowerment, Shipra Publications, New Delhi.

[2] Ahmad, Imtiaz (1983), Modernization and Social Change Among Muslim In India, New Delhi: Manohar Publishing House.

[3] Ansari, I.A. (1988), Muslim Educational Backwardness: New Educational Policy And Programmes, Sterling Publication Delhi.

[4] Ansari, Iqbal, A. (Ed) (1989), The Muslim Situation In India, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

[5] Ashraf, Talat, Ara (1992), Muslim Women In Changing Perspective, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers.

[6] Axelord, P. (1980),"Myth and identity in the Indian Zoroastrian Community", Journal of Mithratic Studies 3.

[7] Axelrod, A. (1990), "Cultural and Historical Factors in the Population Decline Of The Parsis Of India", Population Studies 44.

[8] Azim, Shaukat (1997), Muslim Women: Emerging Identity, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

[9] Banthia, J.K. (2003), "Parsi Demography: Past, Recent and Future", Parzor Seminar, 4th October, 2003, Mumbai.

[10] Basant R and Shariff, A, (2010), "The State of Muslims in India: An Overview" in Basant R and Shariff, A (eds.) (2010), Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives, Oxford University Press.

[11] Basant, R (2007), 'Social, Economic and Educational Conditions of Indian Muslims', Economic and Political Weekly, March 10.

[12] Bhalotra S and B Zamora (2010), "Social Divisions in Education in India", in Basant R and Shariff, A (eds.) (2010), Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives, Oxford University Press.

[13] Billimona, H.M. (1991), Attitude of Parsi Women to Marriage, Bombay, Himalaya Publishing House.

[14] Borooah V K (2010), "On the Risks of Belonging to Disadvantaged Groups: A Bayesian Analysis of Labour Market Outcomes" in Basant R and Shariff, A (eds.) (2010), Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives, Oxford University Press.

[15] Bose, S., and A. Kullar (1978), A Socio-economic Survey of The Parsi of Delhi, Delhi,