



ANALYSIS OF THE STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA: ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL OVERVIEW.

Dr. Renu Bala

Associate Professor, Department of Economics, S.S.V. (P.G.) College, Hapur

Abstract: This paper aims to provide an overview of the status of women in rural India. The status of women has been defined historically, aided by the influence of patriarchal ideals, social customs, and religious practices. In post-independent India, several economic and socio-cultural interventions were made available to women, but the accessibility of those was influenced by women's location in terms of rural and urban areas. Education plays a significant role in deciding the nature of life the progeny will be provided, Violence in the form of economic exploitations also contributes to women's lower status in rural areas as compared to their urban counterparts.

Keywords: education, hunger, nutrition, population growth, property rights, son preference, urbanization

Introduction: Women in India are treated as a burden to society, not an asset. In industrialized countries, women have proven their worth in relation to men by joining paid employment, earning money, supporting their families, contributing to the expenditure required for raising children, and even making necessary inputs in scientific discoveries. In India, women in urban areas play a significant role in contributing to their family's incomes. Women in rural India are still considered property transferred from one family to another. When a girl marries into a family, she works for her husband's family's welfare, not her parent's welfare. Although dowry has been made illegal since 1960, parents of a female child usually must pay a dowry to the other family, so they will allow her to marry one of their sons. This happens more in rural areas than in urban areas. Families in urban centers exchange gifts instead of demanding dowry. Almost 750 million people live in rural areas, where caste systems, female discrimination, and female infanticides are at their strongest.

In rural India, the only wealth women can depend on is their offspring, which causes a strong desire for male children. Unfortunately, this is reflected in the alarming statistic that female infant mortality figures are forty per cent higher than males. Females are more likely to be aborted than males because of India's strong preference for male children. India is criticised for its low female-to-male ratio of 960 women per 1,000 men. This statistic reflects the lower status of women. Since male preference is adamant in India, women are more likely to be bereft of medical attention, food, and education. Women who lack education are more likely to have more children, as children become their financial security for their future. Every minute, 30 more babies are born in India.

Today almost 1.1 billion people live in India, comprising one-sixth of the world's population. So far, only China has a more populated country, estimated to change within the next 45 years. China only allows one child per family, but there is no such limitation in India, and families.

Indians are known to have many children, especially in impoverished families. The average number of children per family in India is 2.73, but in poor regions of India, such as Bihar, there is an average of 4.3 children per family. Another cause for population growth is the need for more use of birth control. Only half of the population uses some form of birth control. If women were more educated, they would be more willing to use birth control, but in rural areas, females are not allowed to continue



schooling after they are ten years old. The hunger situation in India is poor at best, and it is even worse for women. In recent years, India has reduced hunger by one-fifth of the population, but sadly, one-half of preschool children are malnourished, and most are girls. In India, rural, poor women are generally the most disadvantaged. Blatant discrimination against women proves to be a significant barrier to creating a hunger-free India. To reduce poverty, hunger, and rapid population growth, women must gain equal rights, including more education opportunities and the right to own property.

Throughout India, there is no particular lifestyle shared by all or even most, but there are common traditions among Indian households. Households usually consist of extended families, though families with just parents and children are becoming more popular, especially in cities.

After marriage, the bride goes to live with her husband's family. The new bride has the lowest status in the family. About 5,000 estimated deaths occur each year in India from supposed "kitchen fires", but the correct term is "bride burning". These cruel incidences happen because the bride's family cannot afford; the dowry requested by the in-laws, which can be excessive and subject to increase after marriage.

The nexus of Patriarchy, Violence, and lack of control over Property:

Bride burning results from greed and demonstrates women's unequal status in Indian society. Among India's poor population, domestic abuse is more common. Because of a high desire to breed males, women are subjected to violence and torture by their in-laws if they cannot bear or produce a male child. For most families, male children are the priority because they will support the parents in their later years when they cannot financially support themselves. In addition, a couple may have many children in pursuit of a male child.

If female children were considered as valuable as male children, then families would not need to produce many children in hopes of producing a male. A smaller family means more food per person, and the children have a better chance of being properly nourished. If females were considered equal to males, dowry would no longer have any purpose since in-law's demand dowry because the bride cannot work and earn money as the husband can. Without a dowry, the bride burning would have no sense, and bridal abuse would eventually become nonexistent. At least one-third of the population of India, most of them female, needs adequate nourishment. Traditionally, the men and children are served first, and what is left is eaten by the women and older girls. When families have little food, there might not be any food left for the women, which leads to severe undernourishment. When families have food, they often consume grains, fresh fruits, and seeds of pod vegetables. Since most of India follows a vegetarian diet, they must find other ways to get nutrients besides meat.

Educational and Nutritional Status:

A study conducted in the city of Vadodara in Gujarat state showed that 75 per cent of adolescent girls suffered from anaemia. Any physical activity would tire them quickly, even a move as easy as walking a short distance. It also took a lot of work for them to concentrate. UNICEF immediately established a programme to deliver red tablets consisting of iron to the girls. The programme was installed in 426 schools in Vadodara, affecting 69,000 girls. Within 18 months, anaemia had gone down by 22 per cent, and haemoglobin levels had gone up by 75 per cent.

The girls could study better, exercise without fatigue, and no longer feel weak during menstruation. The programme has since then been expanded to all 25 districts of Gujarat, covering 950,000 girls. Although this is an enormous success, it is overshadowed by the fact that Gujarat is one of the



better-off states in India, and it raises a troubling question of how many other girls in India suffer from anaemia, especially in poorer cities. According to the United Nations, 500 million Indians live on less than two dollars daily. Because of India's sheer size, per capita income is a disappointing 3,300 dollars. Since women are discriminated against

frequently, female workers in rural India earn 10 rupees less daily than males, even though they work the same job. Not surprisingly, women turn to procreation to secure their future. Every year 18 million people are added to the country's population. This produces a strain on the health and happiness of domestic families. Another result of the population boom is shrinking average farm sizes, which have decreased from 2.7 hectares to less than 1.6 hectares, as the land is divided among the children. So, farms in India produce rice, wheat, coarse grains, cereals, milk, tobacco, bananas, and pulses.

The Green Revolution increased food production in India significantly, but educating women in India is the best way to keep increasing food production and restrain the increase in India's population.

Unfortunately for India, many companies miscalculated the market size and have huge capacities of idle products, which have turned India into a buyer's market instead of a seller's market. This is a setback for India's economy as they need to profit more from their products.

Education for women in India is a significant problem. After turning ten, half of India's children discontinue school. Because children receive little formal education, illiteracy is a significant problem in India. Today the literacy rate is a measly 64.8 per cent. Female education is imperative to raising the income of Indian families. If mothers are educated, then child nutrition improves dramatically. A study in Peru revealed that seven or more years of schooling for women reduced infant deaths by 75 per cent. An analysis completed in 2000 showed the connection between malnutrition in preschool children and their uneducated mothers. The best way to reduce hunger is to educate the mother. Educated women have fewer children, leaving more money and resources to spend on each child. The mothers can earn money to provide more resources for the children.

The solution, then, begins with education. Education for women is the best way to improve family health and nutrition. For example, suppose women need more opportunities for paid jobs. In that case, they are dependent for their sole wealth and security on their offspring, especially the male children, which produces high birth rates and puts a strain on food supplies.

With education, women are prone to marry later and have fewer children, a real benefit in a world crowded with people and limited resources.

Education helps women's self-esteem and status in society. In Mexico, where a recent study was conducted, women said education had been their ticket into a higher social standing and security for them and their children if their marriage failed. Education has dramatically improved their lives and their happiness. If such an idea created so much success, why would it not produce the same effect across the ocean in India? How can this goal of more educated Indian women be accomplished? Since girls make up half of the youthful population, the "...international community should resolve to invest its influence and resources in improving the educational, medical, economic, and political opportunities for girls".

Impact of Urbanisation.

The World Food Programme sees that 90 per cent of food is produced, but women only own one per cent of the farmland. This severe imbalance is because women cannot secure a loan from a bank to start a business or buy farmland. Banks need collateral and can only find it with land-owning men. Other problems, such as rapid population growth, can be solved by educating women in India. If



women are seen as equals, they can work and be paid as equals, taking off the pressure to procreate several children that would care for the mother in her old age. Urbanisation affects food production as well. The World Bank estimates that one million workers move out of agriculture yearly. This is undoubtedly linked to India's annual urbanisation rate of 2.4 per cent. As Indians move out of rural areas into urban cities, slums, and shantytowns surrounding a mega city to continue expanding and growing. Severe investments in urban infrastructure such as water, sanitation, food supplies, and transportation must be implemented. As India's food production increases, more people should move to urban areas because fewer farmers are needed. As a result, food prices fall, and more people are persuaded to move to a city.

Urbanisation helps economic growth by creating more acres per farmer as other farmers move into urban areas. People are attracted to urban areas because of higher wages. Sparsely populated rural and densely populated urban areas make the most sense for increasing economic growth. Once most of the labour force is no longer engaged in food production, it is natural that more people move into urban areas. Urbanisation can benefit India if the urban infrastructure is improved for the people moving in from rural areas.

Another way to combat overpopulation is to educate women about birth control. Only one-half of the population uses some form of birth control. Six out of ten women who choose voluntary sterilisation wait to do so after having at least two male children, with an average of four children. Indians do not have a problem with birth control because of religion. They are suspicious of birth control because they are poor, illiterate, and uninformed. In 1976, forced sterilisation was implemented in poor areas to combat overcrowding. The people were told that their chances of receiving money or a job from the government increased with a certificate of sterilisation. The government was essentially dangling a string of food and money in front of these people, and they could have it as long as they went through a complex and life-threatening procedure. A 1993 study showed that 67 per cent of contraceptive use was female sterilisation, with only nine per cent male sterilisation. This fact does not make any sense. Why would the government force women to be sterilized instead of men when the procedure was infinitely more dangerous, complex, and deadly for women? If a system can entail death, and the procedure is the only option for birth control, then it is no wonder why Indians would opt not to use contraceptives. Fortunately, since then, Indians have become more aware of the system and are fighting to change it. Couples in India must be educated on birth control and all forms of it and given options other than female sterilisation. Adult women must be given opportunities to become entrepreneurs. Already in Mumbai, India, this concept is starting to take place. Abraham George bought 50 acres of barren land in one of the poorest areas of India not to make a profit but to fight the problem of poverty and hunger. In this part of the country, 75 per cent live below the poverty line. There is also a strict caste system, many female infant deaths, and little rainfall. Abraham says, "It is the perfect place to start". After four years and another 150 acres, the farm has become the second-largest banana farm in South India, with 200 families employed, and its land value has tripled. Abraham's primary goal in India is to empower rural women.

Chetan Ahya, an Indian economist at Morgan Stanley, says that to significantly change the poverty-stricken Indians, the "government and productive public sector (need) to help rural Indians earn money and be schooled". Meanwhile, Abraham George continues to help poor single mothers earn money and own land. An Indian woman named Rajamma borrowed 4,000 rupees from a landlord and had to enslave herself and her children until the debt was repaid. Social workers from George's farm came looking for poor women to work at the farm, and Rajamma was one of them. They



paid Rajamma 40 rupees daily and raised money to helper buy her farmland. This is one of the many ways peoplmake a difference for women in India. Attitudes towards women must change.

Throughout history, because women bear and raise children, theyhave not been expected to need education or to obtain a job. Theywere considered the property of the men in their family, whether father or husband. As people become educated in the developing world,they realise that women can do more. If there is birth control, thewoman is not forced to produce so many children. If there is education,she can raise the family's standard of living. If the laws allow her to own

property, she can provide more resources for her children. The world hasbeen reluctant to treat women as equal human beings. After all, it hasbeen less than a century since women in the United States won theright to vote. Encouraging women to become educated, limit theirfamily size, and seek economic freedom, will contribute to India's risefrom poverty and hunger.

In creating a hunger-free India, women must beconsidered equals, receive more education, and achieve the right to ownproperty. This will only happen if the world focuses onthis problem. Funds must be provided for schools allowing females tocontinue past primary school. Women should not be discriminatedagainst when receiving medical care. The international community shouldwork with India to solve anaemia in adolescent girls. Iron tabletsshould be distributed since they significantly increase the girl's ability toconcentrate and exercise, and the pills make them feel more substantial.

Conclusion:

Urban infrastructure needs significant improvement as more people move outof rural areas and into urban centers. As food production increases, thenumber of farmers per citizen should decrease, creating more land andresources per farmer. Food relief should be distributed to the motherinstead of to the father because the mother is more likely to use it to feedthe children. Child malnutrition goes hand in hand with uneducated mothers. Education for females significantly improves a child's nutrition.Good nutrition is the basis for a promising future.Family planning should be taught to every family. All forms ofcontraceptives should be available to Indian couples. Couples should beable to choose whether to use birth control and what type of contraceptive to

use once they are educated about it. The teams should never haveunwanted and dangerous operations forced upon them. For India toimpede population growth, people must be educated about birth controland be offered options. Women should be allowed to work for money and own businesses to combat poverty. If women wereoffered the same salary and job opportunities as men, they could be asource of income for the family.

India has a vast population problem. Educating women would be thedeciding factor in reducing the population in the coming years since womenare less likely to have many children if they are educated and can compete in the job market with men. The international communitymust help women in every way, so women can someday soon be considered equal to men. Ultimately, it is up to India whether she will let women become equal partners in the global solution for world hunger.



References:

Bentley, Margaret E., and Paula L. Griffiths. "The burden of anemia among women in India." *European journal of clinical nutrition* 57, no. 1 (2003): 52-60.

Bhandari, Rajika, and Frank J. Smith. "Rural women in India: Assessment of educational constraints and the need for new educational approaches." *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 13 (1997): 183-196.

Ghosh, Rabindra Nath, and K. C. Roy. "The changing status of women in India: Impact of urbanization and development." *International Journal of Social Economics* 24, no. 7/8/9 (1997): 902-917.

Hiremath, S.S., 2012. The health status of rural elderly women in India: A case study. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 5(3).

Mies, Maria. "Capitalist development and subsistence reproduction; rural women in India." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 12, no. 1 (1980): 2-14.

Narasimhan, Sakuntala. "Empowering women: an alternative strategy from rural India." *Empowering women: an alternative strategy from rural India*. (1999).

Rao, K. Mallikharjuna, N. Balakrishna, N. Arlappa, A. Laxmaiah, and G. N. V. Brahmam. "Diet and nutritional status of women in India." *Journal of Human Ecology* 29, no. 3 (2010): 165-170.

Srivastava, Nisha, and Ravi Srivastava. "Women, work, and employment outcomes in rural India." *Economic and political weekly* (2010): 49-63.