

Rural Women's development: Opportunities and Challenges

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Introduction:-

Rural India is the actual soul of the country where a maximum of its population resides yet it is also the most neglected and ignored by the Government. The major victims of the issues that are present in the rural India are the women. Rural Indian Women are facing a lot of problems. They are in the real sense the backbone of our society but in rural India, their role is considered to be that of caretakers and child rears and education would make not benefit to them in their roles according to the typical mentality of people living in the villages.

Opportunities for Rural Women:-

Education is doing more than opening new career choices. It's also giving women greater insight into the world at large, making them aware of their rights and steeling them with the courage to stand up for themselves. These long-overdue forces are slowly giving women near, if not fully, equal opportunities. For example, women are landing more jobs than ever in white-collar managerial and technical positions. It's clear that girls and young women today are far more informed and confident than were their mothers. Most encouraging, these patterns extend beyond people who live in large cities or were born into affluent families. Increasingly, they're becoming prevalent across society. Women development in India is based on constitutional provisions which are giving guarantee of equal remuneration, property rights, and 33% percentage reservations in all sphere of society in terms of seats, job and in politics, along with the free education, scholarship, hostels to the girls/women. There are plenty laws which can be implemented properly and beneficiaries can get access of those laws. Like marriage related laws in which child marriage, marriage by consent, illegal marriage, polygamy, and divorce and maintenance, etc. Laws related to sexual and physical violence in which sexual abuse, like rape, molestation, eve-teasing indecent representation of women. Physical violence related laws in which domestic violence, dowry, sex determination and female foeticides and female infanticide, etc. Labor and property related laws like equal remuneration for equal work, maternity benefits and inheritance property, etc could develop society in general and women in particular.

Development of Rural women has been receiving attention of the central government right from its first five year plan 1951-56. But the in 9th plan of central government made some significant changes in developmental strategies of women. Women empowerment became primary objectives of in 9th plan 1997-2002. The approach

of the plan was to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise her right in both within and outside of home as equal partner of men¹.

Women empowerment means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is a process that enables women to have easy access and to control information resources. The concept of women empowerment is an outcome of many critiques and debates of the feminist movement throughout the world. It is also important especially in the nation-building and socio-economic progress of society. The aim of the women empowerment should provide equal opportunities to women, Therefore women could progress in society.

Challenges before rural women's development in India:-

Women are considered as a weaker sex. They were given subordinate status in Indian Society. Gender differences in many societies around the world women are more discriminated by laws and customs, rendering them among the more vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups. The value of chastity pertains to the concept of female's purity in terms of her sexual behavior, prior to marriage. According to the norms of chastity a female's associations and behavior is regulated by the kinship, religion, caste social groups etc. however, the female is more curtailed and regulated in her conduct since childhood whereas the same condition is not applicable to men. Chastity is essential for maintaining purity. Thus female chastity is highly valued, restricting women's control over their own sexuality and choices. Women are protected by the father at her childhood, by the husband at her adulthood and by son at her old age. The male dominated pattern system allows her to survive as secondary member of family and lower citizen of society². In no circumstance is she allowed to assert herself independently. men may be lacking virtue, be sexual pervert, immoral or devoid of any good qualities, yet women must constantly worship and serve their husbands and so on there are many verses in various chapters of manusmriti but particularly in the chapter 4,5,9 where mentioned that women are lacking of social, physical status as well as independence in the society.

Men are more favorably placed in their respective social domain than women due to unequal distribution of resources. This systematic differentiation in terms of access to resources and status between men and women leads to the popular gender discrimination. Thus the practice of gender equality provides women with same rights and opportunities those men experiences. This approach in fact negates the biological differences which are real. The sex differences are real and taking them as the basis of gender differentiation and discrimination, results in role stereotyping. It is this typing of roles that restricts women's access to resources.

The value of faithfulness is towards one's husband. Sexual conduct after marriage is regulated by her husband. Women are only in the context of the vows of loyalty in marriage normatively binding towards husband.

¹ See Ajit kumar sinha, " New Dimensions of women empowerment, 2008.

² See Sushama Sahay, Women and Empowerment: Approaches and strategies.

Religions myth replete with instances of women enticing men, so that the religions restricted women's freedom such as pardha system in Hindu, and code of conduct for women to be covered herself from head to toe so that no part of women's body can lure a man. Manliness of men gives importance to physical power and in specific, physical superiority over women, the exercise of which within marriage makes for physical intimidation of the wife an acceptable norm in society. Women are expected to be the emotional anchor of the family, to absorb and endure the harshness and problems of family life, without letting it affect the children and the men. Aforesaid values and practices supporting the gender system, institutions such as family, religion kinship, primary groups, and caste predominantly discriminate on the basis of gender and provide the context within which roles, norms and values are practiced.

Along with role allocations, certain norms and values, along with practices and beliefs, further promote the male-female superior-inferior hierarchy. In fact, in certain communities, women are not even expected to go on pilgrimages since they should not aspire to go to heaven. In other words, a super ordinate-subordinate hierarchy is established on the basis of sex differences.

Aforesaid patriarchy leads atrocities on women. In most of the cases, women are targeted to be the victim, like domestic violence, rape, molestation, eve-teasing and wife-beating, etc. but in some cases women also are the perpetrators of the gender discrimination, for instance, mothers-in-laws and sisters-in-laws are in many cases the perpetrators of dowry demands, physical and psychological harassment, and physical violence of newly married bride, which result in dowry harassment and dowry death. On the other hand, men are also subjected to gender violence in situations where they are involved in flouting the fidelity or chastity of women. Also in the context of dowry exchange, women are degraded and treated as a commodity with a price tag, to be bought with the most suitable dowry. Both male and females are only performing roles allocated to them. The worst form of these roles may result in wife-beating, rape and dowry harassment. The point here is that both males and females are base of gender systems but mostly one of them (women) is victim of those practices and systems.

Conclusion:-

Gender Discrimination is rampant in many villages of India. Gender discrimination implies giving a superior position to men due to the prevailing mindset of Patriarchal society in rural India. Due to Gender Discrimination, women are kept confined to their households and not allowed to participate in any activities.

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