

Status and Empowerment of Minority Women in India

Suman Kumar Jakhar

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Technology, Jaipur.

Dr. Sarita Singh

Research Supervisor, Department of Sociology, University of Technology, Jaipur.

ABSTRACT

The issue of engendering development and women empowerment has been in the central stage with the shifting of paradigm of development and governance at the global level and particularly in India. Women empowerment and gender mainstreaming have been main agenda of development planning and governance in India. Women belonging to minority communities' viz., Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi are lagging behind as against women from General religions, caste and communities. Against this backdrop, present study purports to examine the profile and status of the women belonging to minority communities in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Key Words: *Empowerment, Religion, Globalization, Socio-Economic Changes.*

Introduction

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. In India, the plight of Muslim women is not better than that of women belonging to other social groups. Despite the honour and reverence accorded to women as deities in religion and mythology and tribute paid to them as personified a historical monument, 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

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. These are additional information compared to those published data of past Censuses. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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 (Dhawan & Singh, 1991). 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).

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 caste 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 discussing the “Modernization of Indian Tradition” points out that Islamic tradition is an exogenous source of change of Indian tradition but it has become a part of Indian tradition and has greatly influenced the revolution and the growth of Indian tradition in medieval times.

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 directive 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 that development programmes, schemes and projects have been passed to women. With the implementation and execution of women specific programmes, schemes and projects, women’s participation in the development process could be ensured, however, the desired impact of these programmes and schemes could not be achieved, leaving a wide scope for improvement.

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 an 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. 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 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. 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. 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.

Objectives of the Study

- 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 analyse 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:

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.

The study will focus on national perspective however; the field survey will be confined to the states of **Uttar Pradesh and Bihar**. We propose to select **Barabanki and Meerut from Uttar Pradesh and Darbhanga and Sita Marhi from Bihar**. We propose to select about 500 minority women from both the selected states. We propose to select both rural and urban areas from the selected districts. The selection of the sample will be made using Simple Random Sampling technique.

In order to collect primary data, a field survey will be conducted in the selected districts and state. The primary data will be collected through structured interview schedules. We propose to develop interview schedule for minority women. The interview schedules will contain the relevant questions,

research points and scales of view perception related to socio economic, cultural background of women, participation in development programmes and schemers, and their impact on socio economic conditions. The secondary data will be compiled from the published and documented sources. Besides, previous surveys, reports, studies and other relevant research work will also be consulted.

The filled-in interview schedules will be thoroughly checked and processed with the help of relevant statistical tools and techniques including appropriate software and tabulation. The primary and secondary data will be interpreted, discussed and analyzed. The central tendencies, results, conclusions and trends and patterns will be drawn out from the analysis of data. Besides, the pertinent literature will be critically reviewed for insight stimulation on the topic of research. The policy measures and action plan will be based on the analysis of research findings and critical appreciation of pertinent literature.

References

1. Axelord, P. (1980), "Myth and identity in the Indian Zoroastrian Community", Journal of Mithratic Studies 3.
2. Axelrod, A. (1990), "Cultural and Historical Factors in the Population Decline of The Parsis of India", Population Studies 44.
3. Azim, Shaukat (1997), Muslim Women: Emerging Identity, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
4. Banthia, J.K. (2003), "Parsi Demography: Past, Recent and Future", Parzor Seminar, 4th October, 2003, Mumbai.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Billimona, H.M. (1991), Attitude of Parsi Women to Marriage, Bombay, Himalaya Publishing House.
8. 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.
9. Bose, S., and A. Kullar (1978), A Socio-economic Survey of The Parsi of Delhi, Delhi,
10. Brar, Manpreet Kaur (2013), Political Participation and Representation of Women in State Assemblies, International Journal of Behavioral Social and Movement Sciences, Vol. 2, No. 04.
11. Buch, Nirmala, (2000), 'Women's Experience in New Panchayats: The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women', Centre for Women's Development Studies, Occasional Paper No. 35, New Delhi.
12. Chandra Sekar, C. (1948). "Some Aspects of Parsi Demography", Human.

13. Das Maitreyi B (2008), "Minority Status and Labour Market Outcomes: Does India Have Minority Enclaves", Policy Research Working Paper 4653, The World Bank, South Asia Region, Sustainable Development Department, June.
14. Desai S and V Kulkarni (2010), "Unequal Playing Field: Socio-religious Inequalities in Educational Attainment" in Basant R and Shariff, A (eds.) (2010), Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives, Oxford University Press.
15. Desai, A.V. (1968). "The origins of Parsi enterprise", Indian Economic and Social History Review 5.
16. Desai, Neera (1957), Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Women and Society in India, Vohra and Company, New Delhi.
17. Desai, S.F. (1948). A Community at the Cross Road, Bombay, New Book Company.
18. Dubey, M.P. & Padalia, Munni (Ed) (2002), Democratic Decentralization and Panchayati Raj In India, Anamika Pub., Delhi.
19. Engineer, Asghar, Ali (1982), Status of Women in Islam, New Delhi: Ajanta Publishing House.
20. Fryar A.H and D P Hawes (2011), "Competing Explanations for Minority Enrollments in Higher Education", Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 22.
21. Government of India (2010), Planning Commission, Engendering Public Policy: A Report on the Work of the Working Group of Feminist Economists during the Preparation of the Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007-2012, May.
22. Government of India (2012), Report of Steering Committee on Empowerment of Women and Development of Children for 12th Plan, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, New Delhi.
23. Government of India (2012), Working Group Report on Women Agency for 12th Plan, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, New Delhi.
24. Govt. Of India (2012), Scheme of Leadership Development for Minority Women, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India New Delhi.
25. Govt. Of India, (2006), Social, Economic and Educational Status of The Muslim Community of India, Anand Sachchar Committee Report, Govt. Of India, Delhi.
26. Hardy, Peter (1972), The Muslim of British India, Cambridge University Press.
27. Husain Z (2005), "Analyzing Demand for Primary Education: Muslim Slum Dwellers of Kolkata", Economic and Political Weekly, 40 (2).
28. Ikram, S.M. (1984), Muslim Civilization in India, New York: Columbia University Press.
29. Karkal, M. (1975). "Marriage among Parsis", Demography India 4.
30. Karkal, M. (1982). Survey of Parsi Population of Greater Bombay, Research Report, Bombay, IIPS.
31. Ketyauntt, G. (1982). "Never married Parsis: A Demographic Dilemma", Economic And Political Weekly 17(26).
32. Kishwar, Madhu (1996), "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas", Economic & Political Weekly, XXXI, Number 43.

33. Kudva, Neema, (2003), 'Engineering Elections: The Experiences of Women in Panchayati Raj in Karnataka, India', International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 16, No. 3.
34. Kulke, E. (1974). The Parsees in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change, Delhi, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd.
35. Marshall, Ann, (2002), 'Organizing Across the Divide: Local Feminist Activism, Everyday Life, and the Election of Women to Public Office', Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 83, No. 3.
36. Matland, Richard E., (1998), 'Women's Representation in National Legislatures: Developed and Developing Countries', Legislative Studies Quarterly, Vol. 23.
37. Mayaram, Shail, and Pritam Pal, (1996), 'The Politics of Women's Reservation: Women Panchayat Representatives in Rajasthan, Performance, Problems, and Potential', Institute of Development Studies Jaipur.
38. Moser, Caroline & Moser, A. (2006), Gender Mainstreaming Since Beijing: IN Women: Struggle for Existence by Equity Foundation, Patna, Bihar.
39. National Alliance of Women (2008), Engendering 11th Five Year Plan: Removing Obstacles, Creating Opportunities, National Alliance of Women, New Delhi.
40. NPC (2005), State Gender Development Report, National Productivity Council, New Delhi.
41. Oakes, Ann, and Elizabeth Almquist, (1993), 'Women in National Legislatures: A Cross-National Test of Macro structural Gender Theories', Population Research Policy and Review, Vol. 12.
42. Pandey, S.P. & Singh, A.K. (2008), Project Report on Socio-Economic Status of Muslim Women in Uttar Pradesh, G.B. Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development, Lucknow.
43. Pandey, S.P., Singh, A.K. & Ahmed, Ishtiaq (2008), Educational Empowerment of Muslim Girls, New Royal Book Company, Lucknow.
44. Parveen, Seema, (2003), Educational Development Among Muslim Women: Emerging Perspective and Trends, IN Muslims in India by (Ed.) S.N. Singh, Anmol Publications, Delhi.
45. Paxton, Pamela, (1997), 'Women in National Legislatures: A Cross-National Analysis', Social Science Research, Vol. 26.
46. Pinto, M. (1995), "Development Through Empowerment of Women in India", Kurukshetra, August.
47. Preet Rustagi et al, (2008), Socio Economic Status of Notified Minority Communities Institute of Human Development, New Delhi.
48. Qadari, AWB, (1998), Education and Muslims in India Since Independence, Institute of Objective Studies, Delhi.
49. Qureshi, M.H. (Ed.) (1998), Muslims in India since Independence, Institute of Objective Studies, Delhi.
50. Rajput, Pam (1993), "Women Leadership at the Grassroot Level in Punjab" in Women's Participation in Politics, ed. Susheela Kaushik. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
51. Rakesh Basant (2012), Education and Employment among Muslims in India: An Analysis of Patterns and Trends, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad-, September.

52. Rao Nitya (1998), "Researching Empowerment: A Grass Roots Women's Perspective", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.33, No.6.
53. Roy, Shibani (1979), Status of Muslim Women in India, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.
54. Rule, Wilma, and Joseph Zimmerman, (Eds.), (1994), Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities, Greenwood Press.
55. Saberwal, S (2010), "On the Making of Muslims in India Historically", in Basant R and Shariff, A (eds.) (2010), Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives, Oxford University Press.
56. Sengupta, A.K. And Singh, A.K. (1988), Empowerment of Women: An Operational Strategy, MMEM, Business Review, Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow University.
57. Seth, Mira (2001), Women and Development (The Indian Experience) New Delhi: Sage Publications.
58. Singh, A.K. & Singh, A.P. (2012), Care and Protection of Girl Children in India, Bal Vikas Prakashan, New Delhi.
59. Singh, A.K. (2003), Empowerment of Muslim Women In India: Emerging Perspectives, IN Muslims In India By (Ed.) S.N. Singh, Anmol Publications, Delhi.
60. Singh, A.K. (2010), An Overview of Gender Budgeting in India, IN Gender Budgeting and Women Empowerment in India Edited by Singh, A.K. et.al., Serials Publications, New Delhi.
61. Singh, A.K. et.al, (Ed.) (2013), Gender Violence in India: Emerging Issues, Challenges and Way Forward, Rashtriya Bal Vikas Prakashan, New Delhi.
62. Singh, A.K. et.al. (Ed.) (2012), Women Entrepreneurship in India: Issues, Challenges and Way Forward, Serials Publications, New Delhi.