

Economic Empowerment of the rural women - A key component to promote economic growth in South Asia and particularly in India

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Abstract: Women are an integral part of every society who constitute half of the population across the globe and only 41% of the women are working in the agricultural sector. South Asia practices extreme level of discrimination against women in all sectors and are treated like slaves, however with Industrial revolution and men moving out of their homes in search of better employment , we find women taking charge of the agriculture land which is found in many of the South Asian countries . In India the place of women in society has always changed from time to time , where during the Rig Veda time women had access to everything and where considered equal to men , with the passage of time during the medieval period we see a change in the mindset of the society where women have taken the role of reproduction and care takers of their homes , which mindset continues till today and we see women across the country fighting for their basic human rights , We require an upgradation , we need to involve women in the economic sector especially rural women where majority of the population reside , India being an agricultural country , is highly dependent on agricultural as its primary source of income. If we empower women we can end the problem of poverty, gender inequality, and economic crisis to a high extent and reach universal education for all not only in India but across South Asia.

Keywords: Women empowerment, rural economy, agricultural sector, South Asia, India, discrimination

Introduction

Women if provided an opportunity can play a vital role in the development of the world and the growth of its country. Women across the world are discriminated and are kept away from maximum opportunities. Women are considered as second citizens in most of the South Asian countries, they are victims of rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dowry death etc. In the South Asian countries maximum people live in the rural area and maximum women reside there, due to religious beliefs and rituals there are kept away from the agriculture sector which is the main source of income for the rural people, we also have forest, fishery culture, handicraft and livestock. Women are usually kept at home and their job incorporates bearing children and doing household work, women unpaid work outside home would include collecting woods and water. However with time , situation are changing and we require women in the employment sector for economic growth , Around 41% of the women across the world are involved in the agriculture work. Around 68% of the women are working in the agriculture sector in extreme poverty and some take up alternative works to generate income and do work which are risky and involves threat to life. Modern slavery involves the life of 28.7 million women and girls these incorporate forced labour in the sector of economic, domestic work, sex industry. In agriculture, fishery and forestry sex distribution of victims of forced labour amounts to 32 % of the victims. Women in the rural area are less engaged in the employment sector compared to urban women. Moreover women in the rural areas are victims of floods, droughts and climate change and even disaster management because of social norms and unequal distribution of roles and resources. Women constitute majority of the world's poor population and are highly dependent on men for their living .From the context of climate change women face more problem of food shortage and water crisis because of less harvest. Women in the rural areas lack access to education and basic health care facilities along with lack of information on job opportunities followed by social norms and the gender-based discrimination. Women's role according to the society includes cooking food, being wives and mother, guiding their children and providing knowledge on the traditional, values, rituals and customs of their community which is basic to their living. With the increase in food prices, food are less accessible to the poor and the women and children are the one who suffer the most in this regard and they are even kept away from decision making related to agricultural work, even in most parts of the South Asian countries the birth of girl child is considered a curse, followed by lack of nutrition based food available to the pregnant women and her children results in the death of many children.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of this exploration, I have used a amalgamation of two of the archetypical social sciences research tools application –as they are authentic and brilliant method to assemble statistics from multiple appellants in a methodical and convenient way. Question were asked to the parents and their children, survey, interviews –consisting of several interrogation which were dispersed among representative of each contender group.

Objective of the Research Paper

The main areas of exploration in this paper incorporates

- 1.The present condition of women in South Asia
2. Why we require rural women empowerment in the economic sector.
- 3.What is the situation in India of rural women .

4. What is the government doing to empower rural women in India

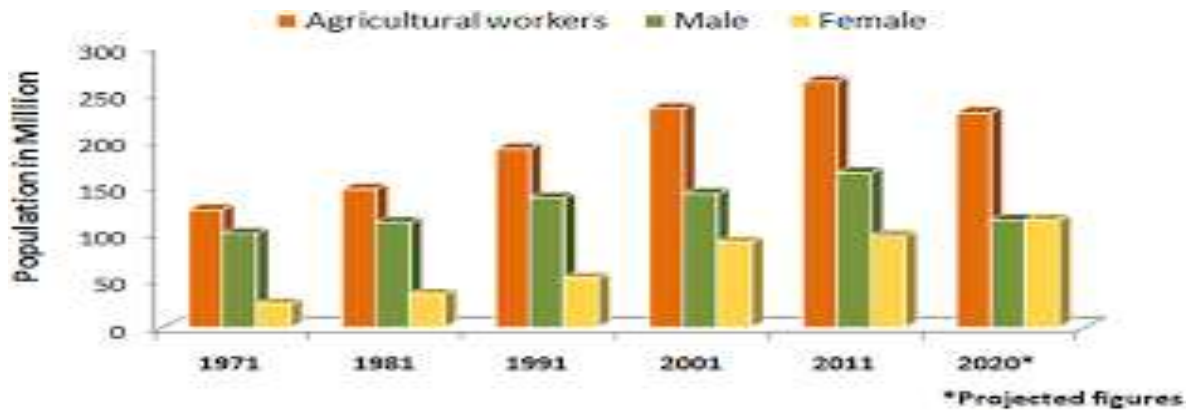
Literature Review

Rural women and girls are provided less opportunities compared to rural men and boys. Women and girls have less access to education and health care facilities. They are confined to homes and during household work. In South Asia women are not given importance in the labour force, agriculture has still provided little hope of opportunity to empower rural women economically. For instance in Bangladesh the microfinance revolution and NGO-led training programs has provided thousands of women with the opportunity to become frontline workers. South Asia tops the list when it comes to gender inequality. It records the highest cases of child marriage and domestic violence against women. Women are overvalued for their unpaid work and kept away from the labour force. As economic development starts in South Asia men are entering into the manufacturing sector and industrialisation for better employment leaving women responsible for agriculture work. In countries like Bhutan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh we see a rise in rural women entering the agricultural sector and which has risen to 60 to 90%. In India today majority of women are part of the agriculture sector due to high rise in poverty. The ILO approaches to encourage rural women empowerment and gender equality in the rural sector by four strategic objectives which incorporate employment promotion, international labour standards and social protection and social dialogue and respect for fundamental principles and right to work. Women empowerment in the rural economy should be encouraged where they are provided decent work with safety and security, including young women, providing them agricultural rights and introducing laws and policies which provide them work and protect their employment, it is estimated that majority of the women both in the rural and urban sector leave the employment sector due to safety and security issues, gender inequality and social norms. Countries across South Asia are working to empower women in the employment sector by opening up of schools and colleges facilities for women and girl childlike in Sri Lanka, India, providing basic facilities like health care services and free mid-day meals at schools for children. After the pandemic situation we see an increase in the participation of rural women in the economic sector, with global economic crisis we see a loss in economic which the whole world is facing and to overcome this scenario we require the involvement of women in the work sector where in majority of the South Asian countries the primary source of income is agriculture. Rural women empowerment can help a country transform its economic sector along with provide develop as sustainable self-sufficient country. Empowering rural women can help us to achieve our sustainable development goals and help to eradicate poverty and hunger, provide decent work, end gender inequality, universal access to education and end inequality in all its form for development and growth of the nation. We are moving towards globalisation, we are living in the age of technology and in order to achieve more we require women involvement.

Findings

India has the second largest population in the world, which is estimated to be 1.2 billion out of which 70% of the people live in the rural area which is dominated by agriculture, orthodox rules and regulation, religious beliefs and rituals. 662.30 million females constitute India's population. Rural women empowerment is the key tool to achieve economic transforming, followed by environment protection and social change to make India sustainable. Lack of access to health care services, education and skill development make them behind of all. Rural Women Empowerment can help India develop itself sustainably.

In India women have very less control or right over agricultural sector, they are kept away from the farms and their entry into the farm is considered evil, in many villages women do work in farms when they are the only source of income for their family, women do little work on the agriculture land and have no access to the market, only men can. The problem is the lack of education among the women that keep them left behind as there are many laws for the protection of women and their rights, right to work, right over agricultural law, with lack of skills and awareness about their rights, women economic empowerment becomes difficult in India. However with food security issues and the rise in food prices have forced the women community to enter into the agriculture sector to generate income so that they are able to feed their families. If we allow rural women empowerment, we can get over with the problem of nutrition based food and health crisis in the rural area, if we educate women they will have a clear knowledge on nutrition based which is required for their health and for their family especially for the pregnant women and her child, Nutrition based food will minimize the death rate among the children as in India out of every five child three children die out of malnutrition and most are living in the rural sector. Farming system for nutrition approach has started to improve the nutritional status of small farmers, Nutrition literacy is being provided in many states, explaining which crops are important to grow for healthy growth and development, nutrition based awareness programme, nutrition garden of fruits and vegetables supporting invention in poultry and fishery. Community Nutrition garden has been started by women in many states to promote the growth of nutrition based crops especially millets and pulses, this has been a successful example how empowering rural women economically can help in the better growth of the society.



Lack of Sanitary pads facilities in India , only 18% of the women and girls in India have access to sanitary pads , where as 82% of the female population have no clue what a sanitary pad is and what is used for which has resulted in greater health issues in women and girls .The cost of a single pad is 6 to 7 rs , we rarely find pad available in the rural area and moreover the conservative and orthodox mentality of many families prohibit women from using pads and purchase it .It has a social and political bias. If we empower and educate women and make them economically independent this issue can be resolved, as these are basic needs and women needs to utilise it to protect itself from different kind of infection and stay in good health. Education is the key weapon to empower and make women economically independent in rural India.

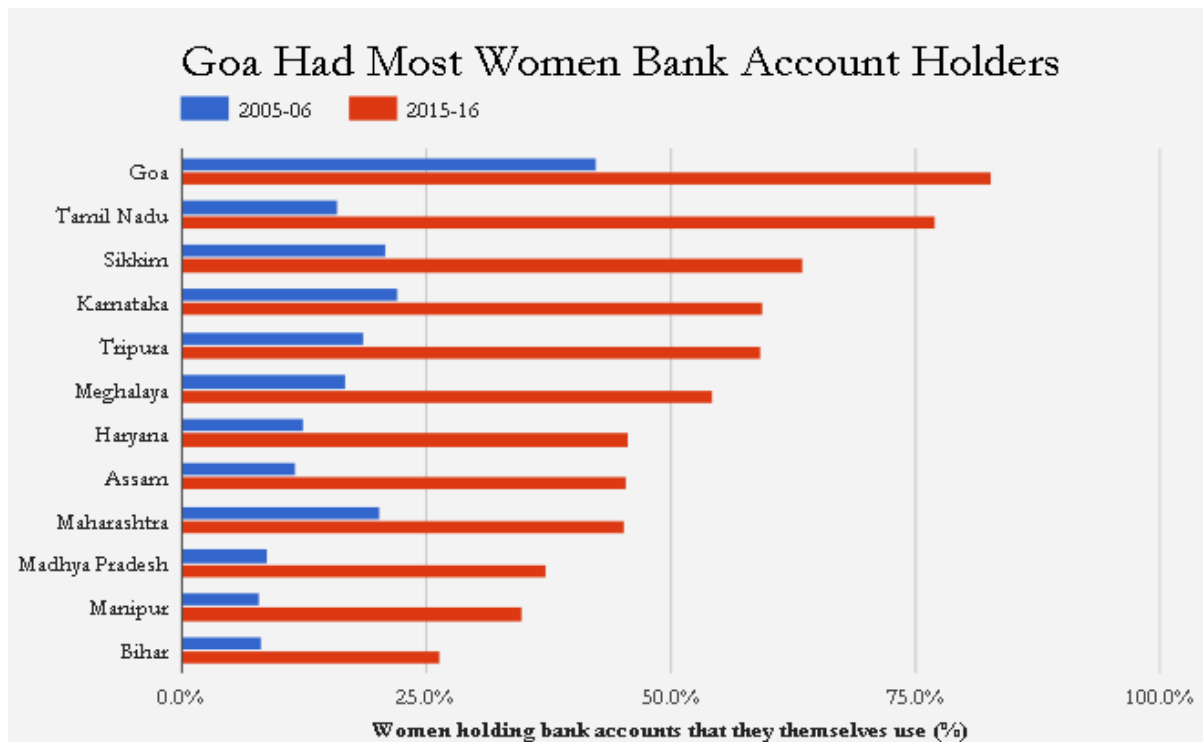
In rural India we see a decline in the rate of women working at a greater pace compared to women working in the urban area, Sustained economic growth has resulted in the access to education and health care facilities for the women. Women accounted to more than 25% in the year 2011- 12, which has declined since 2005 and this worse than Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Where the rate is high for rural women,

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment has provided opportunity for women in the paid labour from unpaid agricultural work on family and agriculture land to formal and paid work. The Mahatma Gandhi National rural employment is however limited to 100 days per year. The lack of formal jobs and shrinking of agricultural work has resulted a decline in the number of women in the rural economy.

The government of India has taken many initiatives to empower rural women economically by introducing the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme which aims at educating girls and ending gender discrimination , Mahila-E-Haat is another scheme launched by the Ministry of women which is an online market platform that grip technology to help women entrepreneurs , self-help groups , NGOs to showcase their production and services and it also facilitates direct contact between the consumer and producer , providing training and organising small workshops with a web based approach for their economic empowerment, this is available for the all women across 24 states it is serving with 17 lakh visitors and services across 18 categories , above all everything can be handled by the mobile , you don't require a laptop or computer for that .

Mahila Shakti Kendra was launched by the government of India in 2017 to authorize rural women with the chance to enhance themselves through skill development , provide digital literacy on health and nutrition , it is working in 115 backward districts by community engagement through student volunteers . It also provides an interface for rural women to approach the government to avail their entitlement and work on capacity building at the national , district , state and block level.

Sukanay Samridhi Yojana comes under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme , a bank saving scheme for girl child. It can be opened by an Indian post office or a branch of any bank authorised for a girl child between the time of birth till the age of ten , only one account is accessible for one child with a minimum deposit of 1000 rupee , the account offers 8.6 % of interest and there is no limit to the deposit per month and its allows a withdrawal of 50% during the time of higher education at the age of 18 years , deposit can be made till 14 years of account .



Support for Training and Employment Programmes for Women (STEP) scheme another initiative taken by the government to empower women, it provides training facilities to the women from the age of 16 to become entrepreneurs, it is run through a grant, STEP is available in any sector and delivery skills in the field of employability, entrepreneurship, and not just restricted to agriculture, handlooms, food processing, horticulture, tailoring, embroidery, handicrafts, computers and IT-enabled services, also incorporates spoken English classes, gems and jewellery, hospitality and travel and tourism.

Empowering rural women economically can help to eradicate domestic violence against women to a great extent, made life better for widow women, end child marriage, counter old customs and religious belief and end gender-based discrimination and reduce poverty to half and provide maximum support for development.

Suggestions

1. Empowering people in rural areas particularly women and youth, including through organisation such as local cooperative, rural agro industry to maintain sustainable growth and effective participation of rural people and communities in the management of their own socio-economical and environmental objectives.
2. We need to encourage vulnerable groups, women's, youth and other rural communities to their active participations in the elaboration of local and national planning for rural development.
3. We need to announce special education plan for rural girls, special employment project for rural youth to provide safety and security of their livelihoods.
4. We need to provide special rural insurance which will cover land, water security, farming intelligence to fostering social economic growth in rural sector.
5. We need to open mobile rural unit (rural health camp, agricultural education and Entrepreneurship programme to maximize rural sector growth.
6. We need to create special women facility, child plan (Education, food, health) scheme to provide maximum support in this sector.
7. We need to make it compulsory to provide free sanitary campaign and sanitary pad in every public toilet with national promotion.
8. Providing excellent facilities towards women labourers by eradicating orthodox mentality of Indian society. Those footsteps can completely abolish the malpractice of hidden child labour which is a malignant for our modern society.
9. Due to less education and less technical efficiency, our labourers become less competitor in front of global parameters, so we need to set up awareness camps in rural area for enthusiastic young labours to provide opportunity of global labour standard.
10. We need to introduce special food security facilities for women and child care.
11. We need to introduce food bank which will provide a benefit strategy that covers food waste management, food safety and nutrient, food banking policy for maximum restoration of food waste, Women and child food safety and security.
12. We need to introduce food bank to provide maximum growth in rural and urban sector.
13. We need to introduce free food once a week for rural and tribal sector to provide maximum food safety and management.
14. We need to provide free food on the basis of nutrient structure to pregnant mother and mal-nutrient as we know our nation accounted for 22% of global burden of food security.

15. We need to introduce remote medical support camps to make significant changes , promote safety and hospitality in remote areas.
16. We need to introduce adult education in every village to educate women and provide them decent work opportunity.
17. We need to promote handicraft business among the villager women to enhance their opportunity into the work sector.
18. We need to organise awareness programs on women health, family planning and education to motivate women to establish themselves and be part of the rural economy with direct contact with NGOs .

Conclusion

Women entering the economic sector in rural areas can help us to eradicate poverty to a high extent in South Asia, especially after the COVID-19 situation it becomes necessary to include women in the agriculture and other kind of work like horticulture, fishery, forest work, and handicraft. South Asia is one of the region which experiences high rate of rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence against women , dowry death , gender-based discrimination at the work place , the region lacks gender equality and is dominated by societal norms where a women is kept at home , we need to change this attitude of the society and break all the barriers which come in the way of the development and growth of a sustainable world because of this mindset , it is estimated that during a natural disaster is the female gender that suffer the most as they have no idea how to handle the situation where India is prone to natural disaster and having the second largest population in the world it women society suffers the most , as India is dominated by caste system ,gender inequality and orthodox beliefs which requires immediate action.

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