

Women Being the Most Neglected Agent in the South Asian Societies

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Summary

Women played by seven different roles in a society namely, parental, occupational, conjugal, domestic, kin, community and individual to determine status of a woman. Despite of the several roles played, women were not accepted and didn't get proper regard in their husbands' families until and unless they had a son. Discrimination against females in the allocation of food and health care within the household was one of the major problems faced by women in South Asia. The situation was more critical in Hindu's traditions where women were not allowed to perform birth, death and marriage rituals. Women were mostly living inside the four walls of a house and their activities were mostly to bear and raise children and do household chores. Women were rated less wise than men in most of the societies and in Pakistan people were of the view to keep women in certain limits as if women became modern, they would loose their respect. One half of the female university students in Karachi and more than one third in Lahore believing that their parents wouldn't allow them to do paid job with men, rather they would like them to be mostly involved in household chores. Study conducted on women role and status in Nepal revealed that status of women was not uniform and senior females were controlling resources and determining expenses and budget allocations for the family. However, women life was mostly centered on their traditional roles like taking care of most household chores, fetching water, feeding animals and doing farm work. Their status was mostly contingent on their husbands and parents. Women were far from

achieving equal participation in decision making and leadership and or had small share in decision making and leadership in most parts of the world, because girls, in contrast to boys, were socialized to play passive roles and given little opportunities to make decisions or develop leadership skills outside the family context. Paying due attention to women and providing more opportunities to women to fully exploit their potentials for development of the society would bring more desirable results.

Key Words: Women, Role, Society, South Asia

Introduction

Women have been one of the neglected agents in South Asian countries. Being integral part of the society by playing important role in household activities and other aspects of life women haven't got the due status, probably because of their smaller/neglected financial autonomy, son preferences, specific household/other tasks and imposed cultural restrictions. Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1979) also reported that women were living inside the four walls of a house and their activities were mostly to bear and raise children and do household chores. Despite the several roles played, women were not accepted and didn't get proper regard in their husbands' families until and unless they had a son. In addition, discrimination against females in the allocation of food and health care within the household was one of the major problems faced by women in South Asia (Cain, 1994).

Such conditions will not only result poor personality development of the women where she is not able to make valuable decisions, further frustration would occur as women their self would feel weightless and deprived off due rights. Women lacked experience of decision making and leadership in the public arena, because girls, in contrast to boys, were socialized to play passive roles and given little

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opportunities to make decisions or develop leadership skills outside the family context (Lorraine, 1997). If considerable weight is given to women due status and higher education, they would be able to play major roles in most of the day to-day activities regarding human and society development. This in turn will result in most promising results in most aspects of life as well qualified women, having paid jobs residing in well developed areas and nuclear families had more power to make household decision than illiterate, non-working women residing in rural and poorly developed areas (Sathar and Kazi, 1990; Mumtaz, 1990; McWilliam et al., 1990; Mujahid and Mukhtar, 1991). Thus, it is imperative to realize the status of women and their rendered unpaid services in the society for better development.

Findings and discussion

Men and women are two integral parts of the society influencing developmental and adoption process. Women could share so many responsibilities with men including income generation if activities are carefully planned and resources are properly utilized. Beside, their active involvement in household chores and unpaid services, women are playing several roles in the society. Oppong (1980) stated seven different roles played by women in a society namely, parental, occupational, conjugal, domestic, kin, community and individual to determine status of a woman. Despite the fact that woman is playing several roles as mentioned earlier on, they are still treated with more or less discriminatory attitude in different societies of the world. Saha and Saha (1998) found that women were not accepted and didn't get proper regard in their husbands' families until and unless they had a son. Discrimination against females in the allocation of food and health care within the household was one of the major problems faced by women in South Asia (Cain, 1994). The situation was more critical in Hindu's traditions where women were not allowed to perform birth, death and marriage rituals (Benjamin, 1991). In most western societies women are at par with men while in the developing countries with special reference to south Asia, women are wholly and or partially dependent on men. This is because of the economic dependency, cultural issues and specific tasks which otherwise wouldn't allow the women to be at par with men. Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1979) reported that women were living inside the four walls of a house and their activities were mostly to bear and raise children

and do household chores. Socio-economic conditions of the women affected/facilitated their ability to act autonomously (Boulous et al., 1991). A considerable weight given to women status in every society is of prime importance as women could play a major role in most of the day to-day activities regarding human development. According to the UN charter regarding women status, woman should have an equal access to knowledge, economic resources and political power as well as their personal autonomy in the process of decision making (Anonymous, 1991). This in turn will result in most promising results in most aspects of life as well qualified women, having paid jobs residing in well developed areas and nuclear families had more power to make household decision than illiterate, non-working women residing in rural and poorly developed areas (Sathar and Kazi, 1990; Mumtaz, 1990; McWilliam et al., 1990; Mujahid and Mukhtar, 1991). Thus, less dependent the women are, the better will be adoption rate of contraception and more attention will then be paid to her status. Kress and Winfer (1997) reported that women with higher unearned income in Pakistan like household good, land and jewelry inaccessible by men made the women more independent and resulted in overall lower fertility for women in both urban and rural areas. The authors suggested that an increase in un-earned income for rural women by 25%, compared to un-earned income for men resulted in a drop in the fertility rate by one child per couple. Thus, imposed Government. policies on putting more financial resources in the hands of women could ultimately help improve contraceptive use and would result in better autonomy of the women.

Despite the fact that women could play a major role in development of the society, still men believe that women shall be kept away from most of the other than household activities. Probably, women are rated less wise than men in most of the societies. This idea was also supported by findings of Ahmad (1990), who stated that majority of the respondents in Faisalabad, Pakistan were of the view to keep women in certain limits as if women became modern, they would loose their respect. The respondents did argue that all women were not that much wiser to run off-house tasks in a better way as compared to men, however, women's higher education and participation in politics was appreciated. These findings outlined a good indication and inclination of the men to deliver a bit power of self-autonomy to the women,

thereby giving better status to them in the society. Conversely, restricting women role to a limited domain in the society would create several complications and uncertainty amongst females. This was also evident from the study of Korson (1970) who reported one half of the female university students in Karachi and more than one third in Lahore believing that their parents wouldn't allow them to do paid job with men. Rather they would like them to be mostly involved in household chores. Conditions for women in the society within women were also quite different as for as resources allocation and utilization was concerned. A study conducted on women role and status in Nepal revealed that status of women was not uniform (Anonymous, 1991). The author stated that senior females were controlling resources and determining expenses and budget allocations for the family. However, women life was mostly centered on their traditional roles like taking care of most household chores, fetching water, feeding animals and doing farm work. Their status was mostly contingent on their husbands and parents social and economic positions. Women were far from achieving equal participation in decision making and leadership and or had small share in decision making and leadership in most parts of the world (UNDP, 1996 also ascertained in his studies that by traditions nad by laws a woman is not counted as working for an" employer". The reward she gets for her work is not legally defined as "wage" that re). Bergmann (2005) has wad may be accessed to goods and services rather than cash. A woman works alone or with in the company of small children. The husband of the woman with his monopoly of direct access to money , has the opportunity to be tyrannical. Sometimes he acts violently towards her. He may desert, leaving her unprepared to earn a good living. Women services are not included as part of the gross national product. The author notes that with the changing role of women, some men have started taking a more care of their children. But their contribution to the financial support of their children are decreasing. Although, women provided 40% of professional and technical workers but less them 15% of administrators and Managers still no clear trend towards improvement was found in the world as a whole (UN, 1995). Even in the industrial countries, the proportions were quite unbalanced; almost one half of the professional and technical workers but just over one-quarter of the administrators and managers were women. This revealed that women were mostly in

subordinate position and had fewer chances to compete with men for higher positions in the society. Economic dependency and subordinate position of the women could further develop frustration amongst them as they would feel their-self less and ignored segment of the society and the ultimate result will be their poor personality development. Conversely, women being encouraged to be more independent as children, suffering less sex discrimination and allowed to participate in family and social decision making processes had more positive attitude towards every aspect of life in general and family planning in particular (Zaman and Wahid, 1978). This idea was also supported by Shah (1986), Manzoor (1991) and Zafar (1993) stating that subordinate position of wives dictated lack of husband/wife communication regarding contraceptive use and other important matters indicating women to be the most neglected agent in the society. Avoiding such obstacles, women could give promising results in most aspects of human life. This has further been supported by (Nathawat nad Mathus,1993 and Rani and Yadav,2000) that the difficulties and problems of the working women are multidimensional and may be broadly classified into three types- environmental, social and psychological.

Preferential sex treatment would significantly influence the personality of women in a society. This was also evident from the report of Lorraine (1997) who stated women lacked experience of decision making and leadership in the public arena, because girls, in contrast to boys, were socialized to play passive roles and given little opportunities to make decisions or develop leadership skills outside the family context. The author stated that in most traditional societies girls were kept largely within the confines of household/family, where they were protected and taught to accept the decisions made by parents, teachers and or brothers on their behalf. Ravindzan (1993) reported lack of decision making power of the women to be the primary cause for low contraception. Peterson and Margaret (1995) reported that responsibility of birth control was primarily allocated to women that created sex discrimination as men were held responsible for income generation allowing women to be more dependent on men and living more or less subordinate life. The author suggested that involvement of men in contraception and equal division of labor between men and women would provide better opportunities in order to realize the status of

women in a society. Positive impacts of joint decision making have been reported in most societies. According to Family Health International (1998) women in Cebu, southern Philippines were playing major role in decisions about household expenditures, while decisions about health and family planning were jointly made with other family members leading to better adaptability of family planning methods. Several factors could influence decision making of the couples in most parts of the world. Couple's decision regarding household expenditures and family planning in Thailand, was mostly influenced by the prevalent market price (Schwartz, 1989). Thus, paying due attention to women and providing more opportunities to women to fully exploit their potentials for development of the society would bring more desirable results.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This is concluded from the thorough review of the above literature that women were not getting their due status in most of the South Asian countries. Mostly women, contributing 50% of the work force and some of them have started equally to men at different sectors of life like education and health along with household activities. However, despite their contribution, their roles have been denied in the society. In order to provide them with their due rights and recognize their role in the society following recommendations are put forward;

Recommendations

Women should be treated equally to men and shall be given power of decision making to equally express their views in every aspect of life so that they could play their role in a better way. Women shall be allowed to equally participate in income generation activities with men and no such restrictions shall be put on them to confine their role to the walls of a house. They should have an equal access to higher education.

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