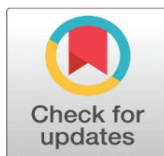
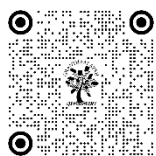


VIKSIT BHARAT AND THE ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The rural-urban divide continues to be an unresolved issue in India, even seven decades after India gained independence. Without a comprehensive understanding of rural livelihoods especially those of women, the aspiration of achieving a self-reliant Bharat cannot be realized. This study investigates the frequently overlooked roles of rural women and delves into the challenges they encounter in their daily lives. The study is based on various reviewed research papers, websites, books, and reports. The study also draws on insights obtained from semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions. For sample collection, three Panchayats in Thoubal District, Manipur, were chosen randomly. The essential findings include financial constraints, political impediments, societal constructs, healthcare hurdles, etc. These gaps can be resolved with government intervention, a shift in women's own perspectives, more investment in skill development, and improved awareness initiatives.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Rural, Manipur

1. INTRODUCTION

Viksit Bharat is an important milestone objective of Indian government which delves to achieve a 'Developed India' by 2047 which is 100th independence day celebration. There are four pillars of Viksit Bharat viz , Mahilayen (women) , Garib(poor), Yuva(youth) and Annadata (farmer) which need to work on. Thus women empowerment becomes important part of the mission. Concerning the women the focus is on ensuring access to quality education and vocational training for women to increase participation in the workforce, providing women with opportunities to start businesses, access credit, and be financially literate. strengthening laws for women's safety and create support systems for victims of abuse and encouraging women's representation in politics, businesses, and community leadership roles. According to Census report of 2011, Women constitutes almost half of the population (Total-1210.19 million, Male-623.7 million-51.54%, females-586.46 million, 48.46%). But 68.85% of total population resides in rural area. Overall empowerment of rural women is need of the hour to achieve a self reliant Bharat. Every year 15th October is celebrated as International rural women's day by the United nations. The aim of Viksit Bharat has a lot to do with the improvement of rural women livelihood.

The paper studies role of rural women in context of Viksit Bharat . It focus on analyzing role of rural women and their contribution in the society. This study investigates the frequently overlooked roles of rural women and delves into the challenges they encounter in their daily lives. The study is based on various reviewed research papers, websites, books, and reports. The study also draws on insights obtained from semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions. For sample collection, three Panchayats in Thoubal District, Manipur, were chosen randomly. This paper contains introduction and case study of Manipur which includes role of rural women, their challenges and measures to improved their livelihood.

2. RURAL- URBAN DIVIDE: MANIPUR'S CURRENT SCENARIO

Manipur is one of the north-eastern states of India which covers area of 32422 sq.km. It also borders Myanmar as a gateway to South East Asian nations. On 21st January 1972, the status of statehood is given to Manipur by the government of India under the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971. Topographically, it is a hilly state and only 10% constitutes valley area. In the same way as India, the obstacles to rural -urban divide can be seen in Manipur also. According to 2011 Census Report, women constitute 48 percent of the total population in the state. Likewise, in rural areas women constitutes half of the population. To decipher widespread Rural- Urban divide, obligation arises to analyze concerns of rural women livelihood holistically. It is often said that women are mirror of a society, their livelihood reflects concerns of a society. The status of women in a society is one of the important indicator of inclusive growth for a society. The following table gives a highlight of comparison between Manipur and India as a whole regarding profile of rural area.

	INDIA	MANIPUR
RURAL POPULATION	68.85%	70.78%
URBAN POPULATION	31.5%	29.22%
POPULATION DENSITY	382 per sq. km	128 per sq.km
SEX RATIO	943	985
LITERACY	70.26% FEMALE-64.63% MALE-80.9%	76.94% FEMALE-70.26% MALE-83.58%
CHILD SEX RATIO	918	930
TOTAL POPULATION		2,855,794 MALE-1438586 FEMALE-1417208

(Fig: Census India 2011)

3. ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN MANIPUR

Historically, Manipuri women has been taking active role in shaping the nature of state politics . They are very conscious about the happenings in various spheres of daily life . Two Nupi Lals which were took place in 1904 and 1939 respectively showed courage and political consciousness of women. Women had enjoyed societal prominence (Hodson,T.C) . Manipuri women are very conscious about political concerns emerging within. When the situation demands, they act as pressure group to influence the government as a collective voice for common people. The Meira Paibis (women torch bearers) spring up in the forefront whenever there is unrest and turmoil in the society. They also organize to ban use of liquor as Nishaband in every locality for the welfare of society. In any other political activities like strike, demonstration also they are always in the leading edge. Apart from political sphere, their contribution at economic sphere are also immense.

Economy is an important basic framework of a society which pave ways to flourish its livelihood. Role of rural women in economic sphere includes various skill works like weaving in handloom, handicraft works such as making bags, mats and other essential items with the help of kouna(a type of weed). In rural areas women are important part agriculture labourforce. Some of them are also working as domestic helpers in urban areas and become daily bread earner of the family. For economic empowerment, Self Help Group(SHG) is one of the prominent initiative among women.

SHG is an organized group of few women in rural areas for their own financial well being. The number of women in a group varies from one group to another. It acts as small microfinance unit which acts as lending agency to those women at with very low interest. This amounts are invested again to poultry, grocery shops, capital for handicraft activities, small scale industries. It helps drastic change in economic independence of rural women. Within the group, there is even regular contribution of small amount as collective fund. Other than this, various financials grants are also given by government from time to time based on progress of the groups. A number of training sessions are also organized by government from time to time for better awareness regarding the benefits of SHG. One of the unique features came across while the study is that SHG also acts as platform for socializing agent as a means of social gatherings. It helps improving personality of rural women. One of the respondent even said that she forgot her name while introducing for the first time due to nervousness in such one of gatherings but now she can become anker of meetings for various purposes. Some of other benefits from SHG includes welfare activities by helping vulnerable section of the locality, unity and bond among themselves as they have a common platform, insurance policy also for themselves, introduced saving habits to women for their own use.

Apart from above points, societal roles of rural women cannot be left behind. They are steering holder of care economy in the society. In rural areas, women engage in roles across gender boundaries. Women always take care of all household chores and look after their children as well as family. Women are main caregiver in every household. They take care of their family from early morning to late night .They prepare food for the whole family and take care of members in case of illness. At the end of day, they forgot to take care of themselves. But they are the ones who make home comfortable for everyone in the family.

4. CHALLENGES OF RURAL WOMEN :

Though women are socially, politically and economically active, the status of women in rural area is still critical one. They are still marginalized in terms of education, employment, political representation, property ownership, etc. The ownership of property by rural women is still remains as a myth only. Though there is law for the inheritance of property to daughters, it is not implemented in reality. Land property of a parent is only inherited to the daughters if they have no male siblings. If there is one or more sons in a family the land property of that parent goes to them as heredity one. Also, daughters of those families don't think much about the situation because they take it as a custom of the society. It becomes normal to them. So, there is hardly any property ownership by rural women in most of the case.

Regarding political opportunities, there is already one -third seat Reservation in Panchayati Raj election for women candidates which was adopted since 73rd Constitutional Amendment act of 1992. It is one of the major milestone policies of the country which paves way to include more women representatives in the grassroot politics so that they can have a say in the decision making process of the state as well as the country. No doubt, the said policy has brought up a number of women representatives in the scene of grassroot politics. But a question can be asked is that by how much their representation is efficient enough to have a say in the process of decision making. The answer will not be a positive one. There are also a number of challenges which compelled to less representation of women in rural politics such as lack of education, lack of voluntary actions from women side impacts on family relations which causes conflicts regarding intrapersonal relations in the society.

Rural women are also facing lots of healthcare constraints. Lack of sufficient nutrients especially to pregnant and lactating mothers is deep rooted. Anganwadi workers under Ayushman Bharat scheme of government take care of pregnant women, lactating mothers along with children and lately adolescents. The scheme includes government supply of Nutritional items like rice, grams, milk etc. as nutritional support for above sections of women. Regular home visits to pregnant women are done monthly for enquiry for health updates. But Still nutrition deficit is one of important problem for rural women especially for pregnant and lactating mothers. This is mainly due to financial constraints lack of awareness and negligence from themselves also. While caring for other member of the family, they often neglect their own wellness. neglect for themselves. During pregnancy they cannot do specific works like weaving etc. But nowadays women have considered their needs especially ready for delivery and eatable items during pregnancy . women themselves are trying to keep extra amount to use during this time of their life. Much improvement to larger extent can be seen in rural areas. But still, irregular supply from government side as well as mismanagement of supply items are not yet addressed. Much support from their partner husband is key to improve conditions of women themselves.

5. PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND QUESTION OF EMPOWERMENT:

According to Oxford dictionary, the term Empowerment refers to the giving or delegation of authority to someone to enable them to deal on their own or other's behalf. India is known as World's largest democracy. The constitution of India mentions about equal opportunity of all citizens inspite of caste, sex and race. Article 14 of the Constitution says that Men and Women have equal rights and opportunities in Social, Political and Economic spheres of our life. But, in reality equality of opportunity is yet to be accomplished and remains as a question only.

Panchayat is the principal institution of rural administrative structure. It deals with decentralization of power to achieve good governance to rural areas. It was initiated with the Recommendation of Balwant Mehta Rai committee in 1952 as an important agent of governance at grassroot politics. This system represents realistic picture of democracy at ground level. The local representatives act as administrative bridge to higher authority with ground level. "The local government is the government that is close to rural populace"(Dr. Radhika kapur). The people of rural area are marginalized section of people due to a number of challenges such as lack of infrastructure, connectivity, economic prospects etc. Thus, proper and active participation of rural population in local self government is very important. They will have their own representatives from the locality itself and the people can approach about their problems. The main essence of governance is completed when the beneficiary programs are received by much needed section of the society. At rural level, this task is channelized by Panchayats. With the help of good governance, the goals of sustainable development program can be achieved in various dimensions. It can help in bringing inclusiveness, transparency, women empowerment, etc. in the society(Zaitul Zaitul,Desi Ilona and Neva Novianti ,2023).

A number of schemes have been promoting the livelihood of rural areas like housing scheme (Indhira Awas Yojana-now PMAY), Ujwala scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Self Help groups, ASHA programs etc. But the question is nature of efficiency of those policies are considerable one. Now, as a part of digital initiative of India, most of the policies and programs are converted into digital initiatives. Sometimes, it poses difficulties to those old illiterate women though it can be done with the help of young generation. Though there are some loopholes while implementing these schemes, the rural people specially women can get benefits to some extent. For example, Ujwala yojana scheme is one of important government initiative for women empowerment .it tries to give gas cylinder supply to women for cooking and kitchen related activities. It is one of milestone policy of govt of India, it helps- reducing indoor pollution, improves health condition of women as well as overall family , enhance other activities of women for economic development etc. All initiatives of the government are of no use if they are not properly implemented at ground level. Thus, good governance can act as one wheel of a vehicle to achieve the status of self-reliant India.

6. CONCLUSION:

From the above points, it can be said that the empowerment of rural women is key to achieve Viksit Bharat . Transformation of rural area is need of the hour to make better and well dignified life of citizens in the country. Women can act as force for transforming rural areas as they constitute half of the humanity. During the period of Amrit Kaal, there are some features to be taken care of so that the gap is bridged. Firstly, inclusion of more women in decision making by empowering rural women is needed. The opportunity given by reservation is not sufficient to make women inclusive in the process of decision making as some of the women representatives are only for namesake as they are frequently represented by their husbands in official proceedings. All the aspects of society like education, economy, societal customs, are needed to take care off. Secondly, Bottom up approach should replace top down nature of federalism. It will glorify good governance based on inputs of rural people. Thirdly, the huge demographic dividend should be checked so that it doesn't become demographic disaster. Since the beginning of 2023, India has become most populous country of the world surpassing China and crossing 1.3 billion number of people. But almost 75 percent of the population resides in rural area. If we neglect the requirements of this huge demographic dividend, India might have seen demographic disaster as a result in the near future. Fourthly, Gram Sabha should be held regularly. It is most important foundation of panchayats and resonates the essence of democracy. It is the platform which the concerns of rural people can be discussed. The panchayat will have to announce the citizens about the details of time and place in which Gram Sabha is supposed to held. Then people of locality need to join Sabha to express their griefs ang sufferings in the presence of Panchayat secretary. That challenges have to be analyzed and channelized by the panchayat and a report should be submitted to the higher authority. Then, the govt. needs to keep in mind those concerns while making new policies and

programs. But this very process of Gram Sabha is not held regularly. It results to the communication gap among people of rural area and officials of the government. Other than this financial empowerment of rural women with skill investment, more awareness campaigns regarding healthcare, voluntary initiatives from women themselves, training programs of various fields, support and encouragement from whole family specially from their partners are need of the hour. If the issue of rural urban divides may reduce, it will help dealing with rural to urban migration when basic opportunities of living are more developed in rural areas. And The core issue of women empowerment can also be addressed once concerns of rural women are addressed.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

None.

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