

Research in Women Issues: Problems & Perspectives

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Abstract: *As far as research in the field of women is concerned a number of research studies have been collected from different sources. These research studies are closely related to the women's education, health, economic participation, political empowerment. The research studies in the different areas of women Included in this article are 1.) Social Status of Women; 2.) Economic Status of Women; 3.) Political Status of Women*

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1. Introduction

As far as research in the field of women is concerned a number of research studies have been collected from different sources. These research studies are closely related to the women's education, health, economic participation, political empowerment the research studies in the different areas of women are as follows:

Accessible literature related to status of women has been reviewed and has been put under following themes: 1.) Social Status of Women; 2.) Economic Status of Women; 3.) Political Status of Women.

During the early years of International Women's Decade, 'status of women' was widely in use and it was meant for improving the status of women in relation to that of men. It was argued to enhance the status of women through improvement in socio-economic indicators such as income and employment, education, resources, enhanced decision making power and assets. The concept of 'status of women' gradually gave way to 'women's autonomy' when the former concept failed to capture the dimensions of women conceived as agents of change. Currently the term empowerment is in vogue. The concept describes women making independent choices, enabling them to emerge from their subordinate position of passive recipient of development interventions as their right.

Many studies have shown **changes** in the status of women with independence, globalization, modernization and urbanization and shifts in terminology with time. Monk (1982), "On Not Excluding Half of the Human in Human Geography" clearly demonstrated the existence and effect of women's inferior economic and social status and begun the questioning of absence of women as practitioners within geography. Mehta (1982) in her study, noted a great degree of anomaly between the constitutional guarantee of equality on paper and low and inferior status of women in actual life in traditional Indian society. Manohar (1983) examined historical developments in evolving picture of women's status in India and then assessed the status of women which was low due to contradictions existing in the society. Mason (1986) found several conceptual problems in social demographic studies of the status of women, and discussed generic problems in the measurement of female status, such

as the sensitivity of particular indicators to social context. Upadhyay and Pandey (1990) examined status of women in India in context of praxis, theory and research. Later Upadhyay (1991) tried to show the significant role of women towards the country's socio-economic development and also provided an account of women's status in pre and post independent period. Devendra (1994) attempted to look at the changes brought about in the status of women after 1947 and examined the effectiveness of legal reforms which were enacted from 1829 to 1992. In a similar vein Sharma (2008) shows the changes and shifts in status of women by examining government policies and programmes. Raina (2009) brought out changes in the position of women from era of independence to era of globalization, modernization and urbanization.

Desai (1998) presented a review of works done on women in India and suggested that women studies have to be understood as an instrument for women's development. Supriya (2008) examines how the planning process for the Development of women has evolved from welfare to development, empowerment and participation; Sharma (2011) in her paper has worked on development policies for women, legislative support and milestones to challenges in empowering women.

A composite picture of socio-economic dimensions of status has been given. Andrew, Lee and Schultz (1982) presented a ground breaking analysis of the geographical distribution of women status in United States; by calculating world patterns of women's status on measures of life expectancy, literacy and fertility. In the same year Andrew (1982) analyzed that status of women index should be composed of indicators from the legal, economic and social areas and also highlighted the fact that in reality data that measure political and economic equality are available only in Western societies. Krishan (1999) assessed status of women from their access to and control over material and social resources such as land, house, income, food, education, power and prestige in comparison to that of men. Joshi (1999) picked up health, social status and political power as indicators. Yadav & Mishra (2003) studied the status of women with respect to education, health and child labour. Further, Ray and Niranjana (2004) made a comparative study of U.P and Tamil Nadu using education, occupation, involvement in decision making, freedom of movement, access to money,

extent of self-esteem, favourable attitude towards girl's education and practice of family planning.

Ahmad and Sahabuddin (2008) made an attempt to measure gender inequality in terms of indicators such as food and nutrition, mortality rate, educational attainment, employment and wage rate in the rural areas of Aligarh district, and reveals that women are far backward than their male counterparts in terms of these indicators. Mukhopadhyay (2009) illustrated the level of backwardness of women's status across the states of India through the following gender development indicators like sex ratio, child sex ratio, literacy rate, work participation rate, maternal and infant mortality rate, women participation rate in decision making processes, safety, security etc.

2. Social Status

Several studies have examined the relationship between education, health, society and status of women. The role of **Education** in influencing status of women as students and researchers has been analyzed by scholars by examining the proportion of journals/articles published about women, or proportion of articles authored or co-authored by women as compared with men. Lockheed and Stein (1980), Jayaweera (1997), Nguyen (2000), and Hamdan (2005). Lockheed and Stein (1980) analyzed low status of women as compared with men in educational research from 1973-1978 on the basis of secondary data. Similarly, Nguyen (2000), Bhattacharjee (2007), Wong and Stock (2008) revealed that though the participation rate of women in engineering, anesthesiology, and environmental economics departments is increasing but still their number is low because of certain factors that discourage students from pursuing careers in these subjects.

Higher levels of education and increased social status leads to women's increased decision making autonomy have been studied. Kingdon (1997) stated the gains of women's schooling reflected in her personal life, like reduced family size, fertility, population growth etc. Bhandari and Smith (1997), and Upadhyay and Sikdar (2009) examined the relationship between women's educational level and their personal and infant care and reflected a sharp contrast in urban and rural women. Kumari (2007) highlighted gender disparity in literacy using Gender Related Educational Development Index (GEDI) structured on lines of Human Development Index (HDI) of UNDP to measure the disparity level on both spatial and temporal dimensions. Sujatha and Reddy (2009) showed correlation between women's increasing level of education and decision making autonomy, access to money and freedom of movement. Mareng (2010) in his study in Kenya examined educated and non-educated women's autonomy in decision making. Ali (2011), in the State of Uttar Pradesh, has observed wide inter-regional variations in women's autonomy in decision-making, on the basis of literacy, education, employment status and recommended compulsory better education for girl child and providing job opportunities to women.

Studies have been conducted to show association between low levels of education and their influence on status. Hamdan (2005) analysed trends of low educational status of

women due to social and political factors in Kenya since 1960s on the basis of their exclusion from household decision making, and political power. Bhushal (2008) in her study on Nepali women revealed how the low educational status has not only limited women's skill and capability but also their health, legal rights etc. John and Shinde (2012) measured low educational attainment of Muslim women through literacy rate, their specified level of education, mean years of schooling and enrolment rates, and found that expansion of educational opportunities has not benefitted Muslim women in India as compared with others leading to their low status.

In some studies recommendations have been made to raise educational status of women. Ojobo (2009) recommended extensive enlightenment campaigns, launching of curriculum censoring board, involving women in future educational policy formulation, research centres for women's studies and pro women policies. Rani (2010) provided an overview of international and national initiatives to promote women's education in India. Rani et al (2011) assessed present status of educational facilities availed by tribal women and recommended to evolve skill training programmes for economic reliance, political leadership or social transformation.

Some other studies related to education are also discussed. Jayaweera (1997) proved the relationship between levels of education and social, economic and political facets of empowerment. Rabyah (2009) and Kandpal (2012) reflected the impact of NGOs and other programmes on women's educational skills, and improvement in their livelihood and social status.

Health status of women has been studied by various scholars in different ages of women, like reproductive health, mental health, mortality, migration and other health care problems.

Kington (1997) reveal relationship between general status and reproductive history of women. Wickrama and Lorenz (2002), Hanretta (2007) pointed out that women's social status makes direct contribution to female's health, main focus was on changes in fertility and levels of fertility. Khan and Begum (2007) have mapped the patterns and differentials of anti natal care practices, and recommended the efficiency of accessibility quality and cost of anti natal care service. Landy et al (2008) examined socio economically disadvantaged women's post partum health in first four weeks after post partum. Vacchar and Sharma (2010) assess the consequence of domestic violence on mental health of women in reproductive age group in West Delhi.

Dwivedi (2007) has shown association between migration from rural to urban areas and deteriorating health status of women. Kumar and Nair (2007) analyzed factors associated with role of women's autonomy in treatment seeking behaviour and morbidity. Basu and Sidh (2008) examined the relationship between work status and health status of women in Northern and Southern states, with issues of reproductive health and nutritional status. Shirley (2009) has mapped patterns of sickness and mortality, and found that health disparities exist even in countries with universal

access to health care. Kumar and Khan (2010) analyzed relationship between health status and variations in levels of culture, regions and development.

Williamson (2002) has analyzed racial or ethnic disparities in health status of women because of factors as access to medical care, geographical location, migration, acculturation, racism and exposure to stress and resources. Bourne et al (2009) examined the health status of women in Jamaica in rural, peri-urban and urban areas, with six predictors of social standing, marital status, health insurance, and psychological conditions and concluded that health status of rural women is the lowest amongst all. Kumar (2009) discusses the health status of tribal women in relation to sex ratio, age at marriage, fertility, mortality, life expectancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and genetic disorders. Kiranmai et al (2012) examined health practices in slum areas of Vishakhapatnam using their living conditions, nutrition, health effects and health care.

Anandhi (2007) concluded that apart from socio-cultural factors such as child care difficulties, marital conflict, son preference and belief in astrology; work induced abortion is an emerging socio cultural phenomena. Roy and Gupta (2008) brought out the problems faced by women engaged in papad-making industry where personal hygienic measures were far from satisfactory and to improve health status of these women recommended health care visits, free medicines and health education. Reddy (2009) studied women's education, autonomy and fertility behaviour in Andhra Pradesh and has observed how women's education, at least, up to secondary level plays a significant role in initiating fertility transition and autonomy.

Studies on how societal perceptions play role in women's status have been conducted. Zolan (1987) has conducted study to show the derogatory position of women in Islam, where laws have been passed to remove women from the family, segregated school system is in existence. Mittal (1995) opined that the status of women has been affected by progression of reactionary trend in the society. Phaladze and Ngwenya (2004) explored the socio-cultural traditions and legal practices that have contributed to the low status of women in contemporary Tswana society. Panda (2008) in her study on tribal women in Orissa found that men in that society believe that female bodies are to be traded, used and discarded and that belief results in marital violence and atrocities. Kalpagam (2008) observed that rural women want to enjoy the freedom not only in their social life but also in their private life which is denied to them by the society.

Sannashiddannanavar and Patil (2007) attempted to identify different levels of empowerment in Karnatka during 2001, and also identify some of the important determinants of women empowerment. The study by Ramotra and Kanase (2009) is based on primary data attempts to analyse status of women at micro-level in central Warana Basin in Kolhapur and Sangli districts of Southern Maharashtra and inferred that the villages, which are mostly located near the cooperative complex, are highly benefitted in terms of economic development and those, which are located away, at a distance of 15 to 20 km, are generally less influenced. Joshi (2010) aimed to develop models and methodology to

measure GEM at village level which is the first work of its kind in India. Adhikari and Kamle (2010) made an attempt for spatial analysis of the nature of gender development / inequality in the State of West Bengal, with emphasis on spatial variations in gender development. Das (2010) using village level data from successive census enumeration, finds declining child sex-ratio in Punjab.

Thus the above studies at both International and National level reveal that social dimensions of status includes activities and institutions such as education, mass media, health facilities and society which constitute the symbolic infrastructure of a society. Indicators of social dimensions of status includes: women's educational attainment, decision-making autonomy, levels of fertility, anti-natal and post-natal care visits, treatment seeking behaviour, migration and association between levels of culture of society.

3. Economic Status

Another theme of interest that has attracted the attention of many scholars is **economic status** of women. It requires that women have access to and control over productive resources, thus assuring financial autonomy and independence.

Ankarloo (1979) highlights issues involved in women's work during transition from feudal to capitalist mode of production within agriculture. Nata and Duvury (1987) review literature on women in agriculture, highlight the lacunae and possible areas of fruitful research.

Joan (1977) examines impact of European invasion on mode of production, household lives and ideology of Seneca women farmers. Raju (1982) has given an overview of female work participation in urban areas of four states of India, and found a gradient of decreasing female employment from South to North. Paukert (1991) analyses economic status of women in transition stage of market system by changes in employment structure, size of shifts, female work patterns, and transition related crisis. Chattopadhyay (1997) studies migration histories of women and their economic conditions. Johnson and Mellisa (2004) examined economic status of single mothers using income, assets and property. Jacobson and Leuin (2010) examined internal pattern for united state work force and household earning outcomes for movers and non-movers by sex and marital status. Bhatti (2010) investigated the employment and living conditions of rural women beedi-workers in Allahabad.

Dixon (1982) compared all secondary data sources on number of women in farms, self employed, wage labourers and unpaid family labour. Ember (1983) revealed decline in women's participation in agriculture with intensification because of domestic work and fertility. Chen (1989) examined roles and needs of women's work in Indian agriculture in six agro-ecological zones. Bhalla (1989) examined seasonal occupational shift phenomenon of women after green revolution among landless women in Haryana. Hare (1999) revealed the growing demand and low wages of women due to rapid industrialisation in rural China. Otrude and Saliwe (2002) analyzed how gender, race,

ethnicity and class operate to relegate African women low economic status.

Stein (1970) and Kossioudji and Mueller (1983) in their studies of female headed households in Botswana found that they are poorer than others and explored the reasons of their poverty. Sanday (1973) calculated a scale of female status by establishing relationship between female production and status based on ecological and economic factors. Tragger (2004) demonstrated that sustainable agricultural community provides space that promote and are compatible with women's identities as farmers in Pennsylvania.

Bryson (1981) explored importance of women's role in agriculture in sub Saharan Africa by association between production systems and social systems. Barry and Yadav (2002) revealed that women are more likely to contribute to agriculture in societies where they have a public rather than secluded role.

Scholars like Kaur (2008), Ghosh et al (2008), Khurana (2011), Fatemi (2011) have studied economic status of women through women's autonomy in decision making in agriculture. Ghosh et al (2008) conducted their study to find out participation of women in farm related activities and found that decisions like cropping patterns, cultivation, hiring of labour are solely taken by males. Kaur (2008), Lal and Khurana (2011) revealed that though in Asia women contribute 60-80 percent in agricultural activities but still lack of education serves as a hindrance to women's role in decision making. But Fatemi (2011) highlights that a woman's unpaid employment or woman's self ignorance about their roles creates hindrance in their decision making.

Studies conducted by Ezumah (1995), Elizabeth (2006), Richards (2006) and Pandey (2011), have shown the elevated economic status of women. Ezumah (1995) shows shifts in economic status of agricultural Igbo women with women undertaking conventional male roles in nonfarm activities. Elizabeth (2006) revealed women's increased participation in agriculture and high levels of production and increased income. Richards (2007) brought out the relationship between women's status and globalization and concluded that economic globalization leads to improved status of women. Pandey (2011) has shown association between ecological and environmental factors and work status of gaddi tribal women.

Studies have been done on the reasons of lower economic status of women. Symes (1991) showed the effects of changing agriculture on lives of women where their role has been replaced by hired labour and machines. Kaur and Sharma (1991) brought out, that women are losing control of both management and economic returns, training of women in animal husbandry is found to be totally neglected, level of improved household technology, too, is very unsatisfactory, especially in backward regions where the majority of women are still working with age-old tools. Idrisa et al (2007) examined the socio economic factors affecting women's participation in agricultural co-operatives in Gwoza, and emphasized the need to improve educational levels of women in order to remove barriers for effective participation. Butt et al (2010) find out illiteracy, lack of

mobility, male dominance, cultural norms, and lack of female extension staff, as constraints faced by rural women farmers. Krishnan Singh & Nayar (2011) have given a detailed account of barriers like technological, training and skill, passive attitude, modernization, credit facilities, marketing system and social barrier. In the same year Mansuri (2011) highlighted the challenges such as illiteracy, lack of experience and training, feeling of insecurity, rampant corruption, lack of infrastructure, lack of finance. Nanik Ram's (2011) study in Sindh revealed that the biggest challenges faced by women are: doing all business in house, lack of marketing facilities, Karo Kari criminal activities and their deprivation from basic rights.

Goetz and Gupta (1996), Hashmi et al (1996) and Ahmed et al (2011), focussed on initiatives or government efforts for women's empowerment. Hashmi et al (1996) observed that participation in credit programmes is positively associated with women's level of empowerment in terms of physical mobility, economic security, ability to make various purchases of her own, and participation in public life. Goetz and Gupta (1996) observed that focus on credit alone will leave out qualitative social change and argued that savings programmes should be linked to banks for assuring that there is access to mainstream financial institutions. Ahmed et al (2011) in their study in Bangladesh concluded that with help of micro credit rural women have improved their socio-economic status and income generating activities. Campan and Bascunan (2012) concluded that training imparted to rural women for sustainable development has shown positive changes in relations, women's self confidence which is reflected from their participation in various other economic activities.

Satyavathi et al (2010) discussed the impact of green revolution and mechanization on farm women and stressed for more agricultural research and extension agenda which integrates gender analysis into process of technology generation and dissemination.

Above studies reflect that economic dimension of status of women includes activities and institutions constructed around the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, and these studies measured economic status on the basis of migration, changes in employment structure, female work participation patterns, transition related crisis, agricultural participation, economic status of female headed households and micro credit.

4. Political Status

Politics has been the principal pillar of empowerment; the more the participation of women in politics the more they can change the modalities and outcomes of politics. Different aspects have been covered to understand political status of women.

Socio-economic profile of women members has been studied by Mathew (1997), Arun (1996), PRIA (1997), Chathukulam and John (2000), Mor (2005), Poonam et al (2009). Arun (1997) inferred that, in most of the cases, women are housewives, first time entrant in politics, illiterate or educated up to primary level. In a similar vein

PRIA (1997) revealed that majority of women who entered politics are in age group of 34-45 years, proportion of unmarried women is negligible, less than 20 percent of them are household heads, 40 percent of members work in field, which clearly shows low political status of women. Mathew (1997) found that 65% of members entered due to persuasion by husband or political parties. Poonam et al (2009) in study of Rajasthan showed correlation in age, education, family type, mass-media, exposure, social participation of elected women representatives.

Studies have been conducted to study women's representation and participation through decentralised planning. Lata & Kaushik (1994) and Vidya (1997) indicated that though women's participation in the political process has shown a steady increase but their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. Panda (1996) in study of Orissa brought out that women who entered politics show great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm and increasing perception of their roles and responsibilities. In a similar vein Tapan (2000) and Mohanty (2002) revealed that women are becoming aware of their rights, working culture and issues of gender equality. Chathukulam and John (2000) in Kerala revealed that women members have shown greater receptivity and willingness to work with non party, voluntary and people's organisation. In a similar vein Mor (2005) has shown that after two years of their entry in politics women have demanded literacy skills and have also become concerned about their daughter's education. Gyimah and Thompson (2008) discussed the extent of women's participation in the governance process at local level in Ghana by studying the level of women's participation, impact of female representatives in the district assembly and mechanisms for assuring their active participation.

Several scholars like Rajalakshmi (1985), Kaushik (1993), Nath (1998), Limaye (1999), Samora Syhel (2000) Bhuyan (2008), Kaul and Sahni (2009) have studied the participation of women in local governance and hurdles faced by them. Rajalakshmi (1985) held ignorance of rural women, decline of political morale, and high expenditure in elections, vulgarity in publicity as factors hindering their performance. Similarly Kaushik (1993) in her study emphasized participation cost as important factor which reduces women's political participation while Nath (1998) and Limaye (1999) revealed that indifference of political parties and male ego is responsible for women's low participation and performance. Samorasinghe (2000) in her study on India and Sri Lanka found that women in both the countries seem to identify themselves with the role that patriarchy designates them. Khan and Ara (2006) highlighted that low political status of women in Bangladesh is due to the absence of operational guidelines and terms of reference for female elected representatives, the limited capacity of the female elected representatives to operate in public institutions of this nature, the lack of awareness over their roles and responsibilities, the systematic discrimination and biases by male elected colleagues. Shradha Sahni (2009) in her study on Jammu and Kathua said that women who are elected are not always treated with respect, their suggestions are not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being taken.

Women's entry into political scenario and their willingness to work on women issues has been studied by Mukherjee (1993), Saran (1993), Gowda (1996), Panda (1996), Pillai (2001), Vats (2004) and Narayanan (2009). Saran (1993) suggested that women play an effective role in dowry cases, resolving family disputes, supervision of the functioning of villages, school, healthcare, dairy, horticulture, drinking water arrangements and running welfare programmes. Panda (1996) in her study on Chatarpur block revealed that elected women representatives work on marriage, size of family and education for girls. Pillai (2001) stated that in women headed panchayats funds are better utilized; focus has been shifted to drinking water, school, education, health care, and sanitation. While Poonam Vats (2004) pointed out areas of needs and rights of women, children, elderly, areas of health and reproduction and environment. Shobha Narayanan (2009) writes women leaders talking about building separate bathrooms, reducing the number of drop outs after puberty and providing safe drinking water.

Kaushal (2010) discussed impact of 73rd Amendment on status of women as a mixed one and pointed out corruption in bureaucracy and women's own deficiencies as factors leading to low status. Mukherjee (1993) in study of hamlet Zhadgar showed differences of perceptions of rural women vis-à-vis their male counterparts. For men ownership of land and employment opportunities are important indicators of well being but for women deprived social status and physical handicap.

Studies on political dimension of status of women represent the articulation of power relationships, conceptualized as the subjugation of one group by another. The extent of women's participation and representation in the state apparatus and women's power in the household decisions are observable manifestations of variations in power and authority relationships.

Following points emerge from the above discussion:

- [1] The status of women has been studied by scholars of various disciplines like geography, economics, sociology, anthropology and political science.
- [2] Invariably, all the studies recommend empowerment of women as a channel to enhance status of women.
- [3] Majority of the studies try to define status in terms of power, authority or autonomy. Very few studies try to focus on the concept as a conjunction of the rights and opportunities provided to women by the state and role of socio- cultural institutions in determining it. Consequently, the studies are able to capture only a partial view.
- [4] No doubt, there have been numerous attempts to study various dimensions of status of women, but few of them try to present a holistic/composite view.
- [5] Though there are numerous macro and micro level studies on status of women, but studies representing regional variations or comparisons are very few. Besides, there are very few studies trying to correlate status of women and development levels.
- [6] Very few studies have used availability of female friendly household provisions (drinking water, kitchen, LPG, toilet) as an indicator to assess status of rural

women whereas the data for the same is easily available in census publications.

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