

PROBLEMS OF RURAL WOMEN: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY IN INDIA

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Abstract

Rural women constitute a significant portion of India's population and play a vital role in agriculture, family welfare, and rural development. Despite their contributions, they continue to face numerous socio-economic challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, gender discrimination, inadequate healthcare facilities, limited employment opportunities, and lack of access to financial resources. The present study examines the major problems encountered by rural women in India using secondary data sources. The study highlights the existing inequalities and the need for effective policy interventions to improve their living conditions and promote their empowerment. The findings reveal that educational backwardness, poor health facilities, economic dependency, social restrictions, and inadequate political participation remain the primary concerns. The paper suggests various measures including educational development, skill training, financial inclusion, healthcare improvements, and stronger implementation of women empowerment programmes. The study concludes that the sustainable development of rural India largely depends on the social and economic empowerment of rural women.

KEYWORDS: Rural women, Women empowerment, Gender inequality, Rural development, Socio-economic problems, India.

Introduction

Women form nearly half of India's population, and a large proportion of them reside in rural areas. Rural women contribute significantly to agriculture, livestock management, household activities, and the informal economy. Their work often remains unrecognized and undervalued despite its importance in sustaining rural livelihoods.

The development of rural India cannot be achieved without the active participation and empowerment of women. However, rural women face multiple challenges arising from traditional social structures, economic inequalities, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate access to healthcare and financial services. Gender discrimination continues to influence their status in society, affecting their personal and professional growth.

Although the Government of India has introduced several welfare schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and Self-Help Group programmes, many rural women still struggle to enjoy equal opportunities and social justice. Therefore, understanding their problems is essential for developing effective policies and sustainable solutions.

Statement of the Problem

Rural women in India face numerous socio-economic, cultural, educational, and health-related challenges that restrict their overall development. Poverty, illiteracy, gender bias, unemployment, poor access to healthcare, and social discrimination continue to affect their quality of life. Despite various government initiatives, many women remain economically dependent and socially marginalized. The present study attempts to identify and analyze the

major problems of rural women in India and suggest measures for their empowerment and development.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

- To examine the socio-economic status of rural women in India.
- To identify the major problems faced by rural women.
- To analyze the educational and health-related challenges affecting rural women.
- To study the economic constraints experienced by rural women.
- To suggest measures for improving the living conditions and empowerment of rural women.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based entirely on secondary data collected from various published and unpublished sources. The study examines the socio-economic problems faced by rural women in India and provides an analysis based on available information from government reports, journals, books, and research articles.

Sources of Data

The study relies on secondary data collected from the following sources:

- Census of India Reports.
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS) Reports.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development publications.
- Government reports and policy documents.
- Research journals and academic articles.
- Books related to rural development and women empowerment.
- Reports published by NGOs and international organizations.

Review of Literature

Sharma (2020) observed that rural women continue to experience gender inequality in education, employment, and decision-making processes despite improvements in social welfare programmes.

Kumar and Singh (2021) emphasized that financial inclusion through Self-Help Groups has positively influenced the economic independence of rural women, although several barriers still exist.

Patel (2019) highlighted that inadequate healthcare facilities and nutritional deficiencies remain significant problems among rural women, affecting their productivity and quality of life.

Rao (2022) found that educational attainment among rural women has improved over the years, but dropout rates and early marriages continue to hinder their development.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of secondary data indicates several major problems affecting rural women in India.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Women in India

Domain/Dimension	Core Indicator/Variable	Rural India Value	Urban India value
Educational Problem	Female Literacy rate %)	65.5	7.1
Educational Problem	School Drop out rate (Secondary level, %)	16.8	10.2
Educational Problem	Higher Education Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)	22.4	35.8
Economic Problem	Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR,%)	27.2	18.5
Economic Problem	Gender wage gap in agriculture/ informal sector (%)	31.5	24.0
Economic Problem	Land / productive asset ownership among women (%)	12.9	9.8
Health-related problems	Institution delivery rate (%)	86.7	93.8
Health-related problems	Prevalence of anemia in reproductive age (15-49,%)	58.5	53.8
Health-related problems	Nutritional deficit/ underweight (BMI<18.5%)	21.2	14.7
Social Problems	Experience of spouse / domestic violence (%)	31.6	26.3
Social problems	Women married before legal age (18 years, %)	27.0	14.7
Political problems	Representation rural local bodies Rise, %)	46.5	0.0
Political problems	Independent political decision-making capacity (%)	38.0	45.0
Technological problems	Women who have ever used the internet	33.8	56.8

Source: Compiled from Secondary data

Educational Problems

Education is one of the most important factors influencing women's empowerment. Although literacy rates have improved, rural women still lag behind urban women in educational attainment. Many girls discontinue their education due to poverty, household responsibilities, and early marriage.

Economic Problems

Most rural women are engaged in agricultural activities and informal employment. However, they often receive lower wages than men and have limited ownership of land and productive assets. Financial dependence reduces their decision-making power within families and communities.

Health-Related Problems

Healthcare facilities in many rural areas remain inadequate. Women face challenges such as malnutrition, maternal health complications, anemia, and limited access to medical services. Poor sanitation and lack of awareness further aggravate health issues.

Social Problems

Traditional customs and patriarchal norms continue to influence the status of rural women. Gender discrimination, domestic violence, child marriage, and restrictions on mobility limit their opportunities for education and employment.

Political Problems

Although reservation policies have increased women's participation in local governance, many rural women continue to face difficulties in exercising independent political leadership. Social pressures and lack of awareness often restrict their effective participation.

Technological Problems

Digital literacy among rural women remains relatively low. Limited access to technology and internet facilities creates barriers to information, education, and economic opportunities. Bridging the digital divide is essential for women's empowerment.

Findings of the Study

The study reveals the following findings:

- Rural women contribute significantly to agriculture and household activities but receive inadequate recognition.
- Educational backwardness remains a major challenge despite improvements in literacy rates.
- Economic dependency continues due to limited employment opportunities and unequal wages.
- Healthcare facilities in rural areas are insufficient to meet women's needs.
- Social discrimination and patriarchal traditions continue to affect women's empowerment.
- Political participation has improved but remains constrained by socio-cultural factors.
- Digital illiteracy limits access to modern economic and educational opportunities.

Suggestions

The following measures are suggested to improve the status of rural women in India:

- Educational facilities for girls in rural areas should be strengthened.
- Skill development and vocational training programmes should be expanded.
- Equal employment opportunities and wage equality must be ensured.
- Access to healthcare services, particularly maternal and child healthcare, should be improved.
- Financial inclusion through Self-Help Groups and microfinance institutions should be encouraged.
- Awareness programmes against gender discrimination and domestic violence should be organized.
- Digital literacy initiatives should be promoted among rural women.
- Women's participation in local governance and decision-making should be strengthened.

Conclusion

Rural women constitute an indispensable component of India's socio-economic development. Despite their substantial contributions, they continue to face numerous challenges related to education, health, employment, social status, and political participation. Government

programmes and welfare measures have improved their conditions to some extent, but significant gaps remain. Sustainable rural development requires comprehensive efforts aimed at enhancing educational opportunities, economic independence, healthcare access, and social empowerment for women. The empowerment of rural women is not only essential for gender equality but also for the overall progress and prosperity of the nation.

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