

The Role of Women In Rural Development In India

Sambhaji Shankar Kamble

Dept. Of Sociology,
Shripatrao Chougule Arts & Sci.
College Malwadi-Kotoli
Tal-Panhala, Dist-Kolhapur

Introduction :

The term development is of topical interest today and the focus of discussion at many seminars. The term encompasses a wide range of interrelated issues like improving literacy developing skills creating employment opportunities increasing agricultural and industrial production etc the most important objective of it all being to raise the 'levels of living' of the masses. These phrases have become popular jargon not only among politicians but among social scientists as well .

Woman constitute nearly 50% of the total population in India .In their tasks as mother who bear and rear the children they play a very vital role in the development of the nation . They are the custodians of the future generation .Healthy children ,both physically and mentally are a pre-requisite for a healthy developing nation . so it naturally follows that the healthy of the mother is an important factor in the development of the nation.

Women And Health :-

It has been found in recent times that there has been considerable emphasis on family planning programs .especially for woman ,but it is unfortunate that the health care of women does not merit equal or strictly speaking more attention .

Considering that the large majority of our population live in rural areas ,the number of rural health clinics providing health care facilities for woman like pre-natal and post –natal guidance ,balanced ,nutritious diet for expecting mothers, care and precaution for safe delivery , healthy food for the nursing mother, care for the new born babies etc. seem to be quite inadequate .

Firstly , it is very essential that the mother is assured of [a] normal , safe delivery ,[b] that the child which is born is assured of a healthy future . Once this is done the desire to have large families would also reduce to a great extent . It has been suggested by Chandrashekar that in conditions of high fertility and mortality , the reduction of fertility is not as crucial as the reduction of infant mortality rate which may even be a pre-condition for the reduction of fertility . his argument is that parents are unlikely to have large families if they have reasonable certainty of the survival of their first two or three children.

Secondly, the women should have a say in determining the size of her family. When people attained a particular status, they wanted to restrict their families and a related factor was that they become more conscious of their duty towards their children. Her opinion was never sought and not much consideration was shown for her welfare. Ultimately the child suffered.

Thirdly, the government should not only provide adequate facilities for the women undergoing sterilization or tubectomy but also provide some alternative arrangement for the family to be taken care of during that time.

Fourthly, field work experience showed that though many of the rural women are not against family planning, yet they do not opt for it, because there is a general feeling, that they do not get

proper attention in the Government Health Clinics, as they are poor and illiterate. Hence the government Health care centre's need to improve their public image and inspire the confidence of the rural poor.

Women and Education :

This again is a very vital sphere considering that the child's early socialization takes place mainly in the family under the guidance of the mother. It is very important that the child internalizes healthy norms and values in order to grow up to be a responsible citizen in a democratic society. Emphasis is being laid here on democratic society because, the norms and values in a democratic society are very different from those in a feudal society.

Though the National Planning Committee under the Chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru had as early as in 1948 emphasized the need for education of women in the interests of the family as a whole, yet not much progress has been achieved in this sphere particularly in the rural areas.

Even if it is difficult to impart formal education in most of the rural areas by way of opening regular schools etc. at least in formal education is absolutely essential. This should be directed mainly to enable the rural housewife to reduce her burden in household chores and be more effective in performing the various economic tasks.

Despite the fact that women are actively involved in all the various stages of agricultural production yet most developmental projects designed to transfer technology to rural people rarely include women as participants Margaret mead while emphasizing the essential roles of women in societies depending on subsistent agriculture states machines should not belloved to exclude woman in such societies from productive activity rather women should be given the education necessary for their participation at every level of planning where the input of both men and women ' ' with their age old differences in experience is needed" ----- "Both sexes have to contribute their specific skills and insights."

It is essential that our educational programs. Both "Formal and non-formal" must take care of our social objective and cater to both men and women as integral part of the rural society.

Women and Economic Resources :

Women contribute subsatantially to the economic resources of the family both by way of services rendered and wages earned, yet their potential is not duty recognized and very little attention is paid to involve them directly with developmental activities and enable them to become more effective and productive.

Rural women never seem to figure as an important component of development programs. While development projects are meant mainly for men, social welfare schemes cater mainly to women The latter generally include talks on family planning, health and child care etc. which are regarded as women's seem to be purely 'man-made' while there is imminent need for women to be integrated in rural development programs, it is equally imperative that men are involved in the health care programs, it is equally imperative that men are involved in the health care programs for women and children and that they develop a healthy attitude towards such programs.

In the prevailing social system where the women have no financial independence whatsoever they are hardly in a position to spend any thing on themselves or pay much attention to their own health needs . the average rural housewife generally subsists on leftover after feeding the husband and children.

Since the beginning of the U.N. Decade for women (1975-85) the United Nations it self has paid more need to the problem? " It is not governments or organizations or U.N. Agencies who are the heroes of the struggle for world development" wrote the Executive Director of UNICEF late last year.

“ It is the millions of women who labor so hard and so long. Under such difficult conditions and for so little rewards, to meet needs of their families and their communities. No praise can be too high for their courage and their efforts but it is not praise can be too high for their courage and their efforts but it is not praise that they need. It is justice and help.” Hence there is an urgent need to involve the rural women, who have been hitherto neglected, to be actively associated in all the rural developmental programs.

Conclusions : So the immediate tasks in harnessing the potential of women for development should be-

- a) Health care of women and children should be an important part of the overall rural development programs and men should be actively involved in sharing the responsibility for the health of the family.
- b) Some minimum education is necessary for women to assimilate the substances of health care programs, nutrition and diet, norms and values of a democratic society, investment and utilization of scarce economic resources and adaptation to simple technology to perform some of the routine agricultural tasks more effectively.
- c) Not only greater investment support to ‘women –prone’ industries or occupations, ie, those sectors or industries which still employ a high proportion of women is needed in the sixth plan, but also effective measures should be enforced to improve the wages, status and hours of work of women in these industries.
- d) The women’s organizations can play a vital role in monitoring and enforcing the Governmental measures.

Thus merely, providing electricity or opening banks in rural areas does not in itself constitute development. Unless both men and women of all sections particularly belonging to the landless labourers who form the bulk of the rural masses, are trained and helped to make use of these facilities in improving themselves and planning for their children’s future, the so-called development programs shall remain as academic exercises in planning and perhaps raise the “levels of living” of only a few elite families.

References :

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