

Socio-Personal Characteristics of Women from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

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Ironically, even after 55 years of independence, rural women continue to be in a state of neglect, deprivation and distress. The work they do is back breaking, time consuming, arduous, monotonous, repetitive, manual and without economic return. In order to raise the status of rural women, an attempt was made to study the socio-personal characteristics of rural women from six villages of Naugarh block which were selected randomly from a list of villages with more than 50% SC population. The rural women reported gender bias, lack of education, excessive responsibility, lack of recognition, the conservative attitude of society towards women and lack of awareness as major problems.

Introduction

The present study was undertaken to discover the socio-personal characteristics of rural women so that future developmental programmes could be implemented according to their felt needs.

The fundamental issues concerning women and their socio-personal characteristics are illiteracy, traditional beliefs, poor transport

facilities, small land holdings, over work, mental tensions, pregnancy and typical agro ecological situations. Socio-personal characteristics is the analysis of the condition of women in society, as contained by socio-personal characteristics variables like age, caste, education, income type of house and land holding etc.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in Naugarh block. The area was selected purposely because of its extensive weaker section (SCs and STs) residing in the block. About 50% of the block belongs to SC and ST communities like kharwar, chamar, mushar etc. who live in close vicinity to the forest areas of Naugarh and Chakiya blocks.

Out of one hundred and eleven villages, six were selected randomly from the list of villages having more than 50% SC population. These were: Aurawant, Semar, Nunwat, Musahar, Shahpur and Karmbandh. Direct questions about age, caste, income, literacy and land holding were asked and sources of data were also taken into account.

Table 1 Caste wise distribution of the village

	Nunwat		Aurawantand		Mushahar		Shahpur		Semer		Kambandh		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kharwar	62	78.48	18	69.24	-	-	50	75.75	32	65.30	30	50.00	192	63.36
Chamar	6	7.60	4	15.39	-	-	6	9.09	-	-	8	13.33	24	7.92
Yadav	5	6.33	1	3.84	-	-	2	3.04	12	24.48	7	11.66	27	8.91
Musahar	1	1.26	-	-	23	100	-	-	3	6.12	-	-	27	8.91
Baniya	2	2.53	-	-	-	-	8	12.12	2	4.08	-	-	12	3.96
Brahmin	3	3.80	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.99
Muslims	-	-	3	11.54	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.99
Chauhan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	25.00	15	4.95
Total	79	100	26	100	23	100	66	100	49	100	60	100	303	100

The majority (63%) of respondents belonged to the Kharwar caste (SC category), while Brahmins and Muslims were found to be a marginal percentage (0.99%).

Table 2 Distribution of respondents according to their age group :

Age (years)	Nunwat		Aurawantand		Mushahar		Shahpur		Semer		Kambandh		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
22-40	56	72.88	14	53.85	9	39.14	30	45.46	30	61.23	24	39.99	163	53.80
40-60	23	29.12	10	38.46	14	60.86	33	50.88	18	36.73	34	56.67	132	43.56
>60	-	-	2	7.69	-	-	3	4.64	1	2.04	2	3.34	8	2.64
Total	79	100	26	100	23	100	66	100	49	100	60	100	303	100

The maximum women belonged to the 20-40 years age group whereas senior citizens were rarely found.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents and their literacy status :

Literacy status	Nunwat		Aurawantand		Mushahar		Shahpur		Semer		Kambandh		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Illiterate	75	94.94	24	92.31	23	100	65	98.48	49	100	58	96.67	294	97.02
Literate	4	5.06	2	7.69	-	-	1	1.52	-	-	2	3.33	9	2.98
Total	79	100	29	100	23	100	66	100	49	100	60	100	303	100

From 6 surveyed villages, only 9 out of 303 women were literate and said they had some schooling (but not enough to be able to read). This literacy occurred in women of high caste (Brahmin) in Nunwat. Excluding five women from the Kharwar caste, all women were illiterate. The reasons for the illiteracy of women were :

(i) Traditional beliefs (ii) typical agro ecological situation (iii) lack of primary schools (iv) non-availability of primary school teachers (v) poor transport facilities etc.

Table No. 4 Distribution of respondents according to their annual income :

Income (Rs.)	Nunwat		Aurawantand		Mushahar		Shahpur		Semer		Kambandh		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 1000	7	8.86	1	3.84	23	100	13	19.69	16	2.04	24	39.99	84	27.72
10000-60000	70	88.60	24	92.32	-	-	53	80.31	33	97.96	34	56.67	214	90.42
> 60000	2	2.54	1	3.84	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.34	5	1.66
Total	79	100	26	100	23	100	66	100	49	100	60	100	303	100

90.42% families have an annual income of Rs. 10,000-60,000. About 27.72% families have an average annual income of less than Rs. 10,000, which means that they struggle a lot to meet their basic requirements.

The sources of income in the locality are limited to (i) agriculture (ii) forest (iii) live stock and (iv) manual labor. These are the restricted sources of income on which an average family consisting of 3 adults and 3 children have to subsist. Almost all families take loans to balance the deficit. The maximum amount of loan is Rs. 3000 to 4000. Mahajans give was out of the grip of indebtedness. They spend their whole lives just fulfilling their basic requirements of food, shelter and clothing. loans at higher interest rates. A heavy loan is taken for marriages, death or sickness. There was hardly any family who was out of the grip of indebtedness. They spend their whole lives just fulfilling their basic requirements of food, shelter and clothing.

Table No. 5 Classification of families according to their holdings :

Land (Bigha)	Nunwat		Aurawantand		Mushahar		Shahpur		Semer		Kambandh		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No land	-	-	-	-	21	91.31	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	6.94
< 2	23	29.12	7	26.92	2	8.69	58	87.87	28	57.15	32	53.34	150	49.50
2-4	52	65.82	13	50.00	-	-	8	12.13	16	32.65	23	38.33	112	36.96
> 4	4	5.06	6	23.08	-	-	-	-	5	10.20	5	8.33	20	6.60
Total	79	100	26	100	23	100	66	100	49	100	60	100	303	100

The majority (49.50%) of families had less than 2 bighas land. However every village has a little Gram Sabha land (1-2 bigha) after capturing the forest land area.

Regarding the types of houses in the villages, it was found that in almost all, the majority were kuchcha houses. There was rarely any pukka house. The nuclear family system also prevailed in the area.

Houses of the same caste group were built very close to each other. People belonging to the chamar or mushahar caste lived about 50-100 feet away from these houses. This shows the casteism prevalent in the area. For making single and small cottages, forest products like bamboo, timber, thatching grass, fibres and clay were used. Doors were made of wood or bamboo. Roofs were made of khaprail, shrubs and grasses. Only one door inside a house was observed in the study area.

Regarding clothing, it was observed that synthetic fabrics were preferred because of their cheapness and durability. Everyone, in fact, wore synthetic clothes. In summer, the older boys only wore gamcha.

Socio-economic profiles :

Village Aurawantand is surrounded by forest on three sides while in the south there is a big reservoir (Karmarnasa River) bounded by the Naugarh dam. The village consists of 26 families. A 'Kharanja' road interlinks the village to Naugarh market. Only 30% men and one woman were found literate up to 8th standard. There is only one primary school run by an NGO; children have to go to Naugarh for further studies. The average size of the family was 4-7 members. However, Muslim families consisted of 8-10 members.

The average land holdings of the village were 2-4 bighas per family. According to the women, there were three hand pumps and a well in the village. Three families had diesel pumps but only two families possessed a thresher.

Furthermore, analysis of the socio economic condition of women indicated that 40% of their income came from the forest, 40% from agriculture and 20% from animal husbandry and labor in forest irrigation departments.

The animal population of the village (excluding those of yadavs) consisted of 129 cows, 25 buffaloes, 20 goats and 40 bullocks. One yadav family engaged in the milk and milk products business. They had 100 cows 9 buffaloes, 26 goats and 4 bullocks.

The forest provides tendu patta, piyar (chiraungi) seeds and mohua fruit which contribute a major part of their income. Villagers do have domestic animals like cows and goats but they are not for milking as they are unproductive. They sell them in the market in crisis periods for cash income. Due to gradual deforestation, women have to walk long distances for fuel wood collection. The close proximity to the forest also creates problems of wild animals (like bears) as they damage their crops. When their husbands migrate to the nearby villages for labor, the women had to guard their fields at the night, so that they were taking on a double work burden during the day and in the night also.

Village Nunwat is connected with Naugarh market by a rocky road which is 8 km. from the village. The village itself is surrounded by forest and its dominant caste is kharwar. There is one primary school and an anganwadi centre. The village also has four hand pumps and a well. The average land holdings is two to four bighas per head. The village does not possess any sources of irrigation except rain.

The women in the area are subjected to early marriages and early child bearing. The first pregnancy often occurred before 18 years of age. The average age of marriage among women is 13 years in contrast to 15 years for men. The average family size is 4-7 members. The nuclear family system is prevalent in the area. As far as literacy is concerned, 98% of women are illiterate.

The main sources of their livelihood are agriculture, forest products collection, animal husbandry and manual labor. Seven men (8%) were found engaged in occupations like driving, carpentry, khoa making, pattal making and shop keeping. As for the animal population in the village, there were 177 cows, 43 buffaloes, 316 goats and 75 bullocks.

Muahar village is situated about half a km. from Nunwat village. All inhabitants of this village belong to the musahar caste.

There are 26 nuclear families in the area. An average family consists of 3 adults and 4 children. Everyone lives in kuchcha houses. Some pukka houses were built under the scheme of Indira Awas Yojana but none of them was fit for human habitation. There is a well and a hand pump for water but the well was not functional. The link road to the village Nunwat gets water logged in the rainy season. The pokhar (pond) is generally used for bathing and fishing.

The total land holding of the village is only 15-20 katha. The main crops grown in the area are tisi, arhar, chana and masur. They can not grow paddy because of the lack of irrigation. One family had a kitchen garden in their home. The main occupations of the village include making leaf plates, honey collection and agricultural labor. The total

animal population was 2 cows, 1 buffalo, 4-5 goats and some hens.

All the women were illiterate. Girls were married at the tender age of 13 and boys at 15. Women go to the forest to collect fuel, wood, leaves for pattal making, honey and forest fruits. For shopping and health problems, they have to go to Chakiya, Naugarh, Aurawantand and Madhopur, which are respectively 36 km., 9 km., 66 km. and 14 km. away. Pattal selling is the business of men only.

Semar village is surrounded by forest on three sides. Bihar is about 9 km. away from the village. The villagers have to go to Chakiya, 53 km. away, for shopping and health purposes. There is one primary school in the village, one well and a hand pump. The well is never cleaned and women take baths and wash their clothes near the well in the open. A major problem is the annual and almost regular flood during the rainy season.

The average land holding is 4-5 bigha per person. There are 15 yadav families who are engaged in the milk and milk product business. Women prepare khoa in the home.

There were no literate women in the village. However, one man and 6 children were literate up to primary level. The yadav families engaged in the milk and milk product business have 25 to 30 cows while others have an average of 4-6 cows. Two families had 25-30 goats. The total animal population of the village is: cows – 260, poultry – 66, goats – 142 and buffaloes – 66. The entire village had only two radios.

Karmabandh village is about 3 km from Naugarh market and is properly linked by road. The village has 60 nuclear families. There were only two hand pumps and a well for drinking water. The well is never chlorinated and thus unhygienic for drinking and cooking purposes.

There are two primary schools in the village. The main occupations include farming, brick-making and the collection of tendu,

piyar and mahua. Crops of paddy, wheat, pea, mustard, and lentil are grown.

Only one woman was literate. Girls up to the age of 15 years were literate up to primary level. NGOs like Manav Seva Kendra and National Council of Development Communication are working in the area of children education, maternal and child care, women empowerment etc. The women in the area were aware of immunization for children, education for girls and the need to save money. These NGOs have established a Mahua and Chiraungi Bank in the village and given them some loans according to their needs. These products are sold in the off season for higher profits.

Shahpur village has forest on almost all sides. There is hardly any proper approachable link road. The village has 66 families. As far as literacy among women is concerned, only one woman was literate in the village. There was just one primary school, but no primary health care centre. The nuclear family system prevailed with the average family having 4-7 members.

Conclusion

Social backwardness and gender discrimination are the main hindrances to the upliftment of women in the area.

Women fully realize that they are being discriminated against, but they lack the will and the courage to fight for their rights.

The education of girls is slowly picking up and this itself can act as a major catalyst in upgrading the status of women.

The area is deprived of proper schooling facilities. Although efforts have been made by several NGOs to provide basic and primary education, the results are not very encouraging.

As far as work-force participation is concerned, women's participation in agricultural activities, household activities and collecting forest produce is commendable, but even so, the right to take major decisions rests with the men.

The lack of proper infrastructural facilities like roads, electricity supply, proper

markets for the sale and purchase of goods, disposal of garbage and waste water, safe drinking water etc. hinders further development.

Suggestions

Keeping in view the above mentioned problems/needs of the area and conclusions derived therefrom, the following points are suggested for the upliftment of the beneficiaries :

Women should be provided with formal education so that they may benefit from modern science and technology and not become victims of their ignorance and backwardness.

Development organizations should organize functional literacy classes for women during leisure hours. In these classes, some basic lessons in child care, health and nutrition and modern techniques of agriculture can be given. The husband and wife should also be approached, persuaded and educated by the organizations in the village to adopt family planning measures.

New crop varieties that require less fertilizers and can cope with irregular rainfalls should be grown.

The use of natural and compost fertilizers, the timely control of pests, the practice of improved crop rotation and inter-cropping etc. should be facilitated.

The people's participation in all these programmes especially small group participation whether facilitated by NGO's or government should be actively encouraged.

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