

Women Empowerment and Their Decision-Making Supremacy: a Literature Review Approach

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Abstract

Women are an integral part of our society; they have to play diverse role to contribute in economy. Harmonious growth and development of any nation is possible only when women are equally participating in the development process with men. However, in most of the developing countries, the socio-economic status of women is very low. In this paper, we provide a literature review to compared the working and non-working women in household decision-making, using secondary data. We find out that woman's decisions making power is clearly related to the context in which she lives. It is observed that decisions made by working and educated women get greater substance than the decisions taken by non- working and less educated women. However, Urban and employed women have greater awareness about their rights than rural and illiterate women. In the previous studies, most women are deprived of economic and educational roles opportunities and decision-making. Decision-making of women is controversially as low as the roles and responsibilities of each sector while their male counterparts have relatively high decision-making. Furthermore, we find out that electronic media is also playing an important role behind the women empowerment, since it provides information to women about the world issues, which encourages their self-confidence and motivates them to participate in household matters.

Keywords: *Harmonious growth; decision-making; Electronic Media; Self-Confidence*



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“The position of women in the society is an index of its civilization”- Mahatma Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Women in the early Vedic period enjoyed an equal status with men in all aspects of life, they have the right to get education and at a mature age they had the freedom to select a groom. Training of archery, horse riding, sword play etc. had also been provided to them to face the difficult situations of the life (Punam and Sharma,2017). But slowly in approximately 500 BCE the status of women started to decline, as shown in the study of position of women in Vedic, post- Vedic and contemporary India. They had not the freedom and equal rights as compared to men. A lot of restrictions started imposing on them; they had not the right to wear a dress according to their choice. Child marriages and a ban on remarriage by widow became a bad tradition of the society in some communities (Saxena and Sharma, 2018). Another example is the using of Pardahpratha by Muslim ladies, to cover their face as a sign of a lot of restrictions imposed on them. In that time period women's role in society was fixed and well defined. They had to play a fourfold status role sequences: as a daughter, wife, house maker and mother. But having all these traditions and

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difficulties in life, some women had a great position in Indian history. They played an important role during the British rule, Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Annie Besant, Vijyalakshmi pandit, Kasturba Gandhi and Rani Laxmi Bai etc. all were the important names of the Indian history, which fought for their rights and the freedom of India. After the Independence of India women started participated fully in the areas such as sports, education, media, politics, art and craft, technology etc. The best example of the women participation in politics is the Indira Gandhi, who served as the prime Minister of India for the period of fifteen years. The constitution of India has provided the equal rights to men and women and also establishes some organizations and institutions for women (Halli, Mullan, 2016).

Women have an important role in our society; they have to play a dual role in this modern global world as a housewife and as a working woman. A large share of rural women is involved in agricultural activities, food and nutritional security is greatly depending on the hard work of these rural women producers (Baba, Zain et al., 2015). Traditionally Indian women were living because of the family and for the family but in modern times views and thinking of women have been changed. They are actively participating in social, economic and political activities. They are receiving higher education than their foregoing generations. The participation of women in social issues is very considerable; it helps to improve the social status of women (Sharma, 1981). It is noted that education played a significant role behind the progress and advancement of women. They have started caring for her health, needs and interests. Women have also started thinking about the health and education of their children, especially for their daughters. It has been observed that the thinking of women regarding the marriage has also been changed, in metro and small cities many girls preferred to build their carrier rather than marriage (Kiran, 2015).

Decision-making power is the aptitude to persuade decisions that affect our private and personal life. In fact, decision-making power is a composite of access, capabilities and actions that shape whether women have influence over the polity or decisions about their private life. Having influence with, over and through people and processes is therefore central to both leadership and decision-making power. As we know that our society has a patriarchal system and women's preference for work is not given consideration by other male members of the family. Therefore, working women can have strong decision- making power if they are independent, while non-working women have to look at their male counterparts for everything whatever they decide. (Neil and Domingo, 2015). So it was important to predict the household decision-making participation of working and non working women to examine the difference between their decision-making supremacy. Furthermore, we also want to examine the impact of electronic media on decision-making power. Thus, our objectives can be listed below:

Objectives:

1. To examine the household decision-making role of working and non-working women.
2. To study the impact of electronic media, social environment on decision-making power.

The purpose of this study is to know about the socio- economic conditions of the working and non- working women. This study will also enlighten the role of rural and urban women in the household decisions making. There are a lot of household and financial matters of daily life, in which husband and wife have to take decisions wisely. In this study we will try to find out the women's involvement in these types of matters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A paper "Studies of Educated working women in India: Trends and Issues" by Ahmad (1979) concluded that both rural and urban women belonging to weaker sections has laboured hard but their social and economic status was not good. However, the situation of upper and middle class working women's belonging to both rural and urban areas was good. The main reason behind this difference is that women of weaker sections are less educated or illiterate so they get very less wages as compared to educated working women. So, to eliminate this disparity there is urgent need to uncover the discrimination against women at the school level or in the house or in the employment sector and should provide them better educational and employment opportunities which will bring an improvement in their status.

Mukhtar et.al. (1991) analyzed the participation of women in household decision-making in Pakistan. This study included both the need as well as the decision-making analysis of consumer durables. The study attempted to determine the influence of decision-making process by analyzing women's role with reference to their ability to translate their own needs into decisions. This study presented that in case of purchasing durables such as sewing machine, washing machine, fan, air conditioner, refrigerator, television, and vehicle more decisions are made by men than women, even for those items which are commonly related to the need of women like sewing machine, washing machine. Women only decided for one third of their own needs. But when this study compared the women's decision-making participation in rural and urban areas then it is observed that urban women have more freedom than rural women in revealing their choice about their needs and preferences. It is concluded that even though the participation of women in decision-making is limited but there are some cultural and social factors which can improve their situation. In modern nuclear family system women are getting more decision-making power than the traditional joint family system.

David, F.P. (1994) studied the role of men and women in household decision-making in the Filipino families. This study is based on the primary survey, which consisted 342 married women and 108 married men of reproductive age. Research findings revealed that decisions related to clothing, food and child care have been taken by women and decisions concerns like business, farming and investment have been taken by men. It is noticed that the age, experience and the educational qualification of men and women also influence the household decision-making pattern. This study has shown the difference between the influences of rural- urban residence in the decision-making process. It is observed that urban residence is more democratic than rural residence. Decisions regarding the choice of children's school, family health, investments and family planning have been taken jointly by husband and wife in the urban areas, but in about 70 per cent families the decision regarding the household budget is taken only by women in both rural and urban areas. A variety of socio-economic factors have also shown that the husband's involvement in household budget as well as in the children's education is increasing. On the other hand, the higher education level of women increases their influence on the family finance matters.

A paper presented by Corner (1997) at a conference on women in decision-making at Tagatay city, Philippines. In this paper he revealed that women's participation in decision-making and leadership is not much satisfactory, the share of women in decision-making is very small and in most parts of the world there is no trend of improvement. He observed that only in Nordic countries women can present their views and make decisions about political issues, but their

decision-making power regarding the household and economic issues, presents very gloomy picture. For example, In Nordic countries a very few women are on the higher post in the largest private enterprises. However, reservation system for women introduced by the government is helping to improve the potential and decision-making power of women. It was noted that some women are excluded from decision-making just because of their low level of education. In the whole world 40 percent of technical and professional workers are women but only 15 percent of women are managers and administrators. So, it is necessary to aware the men for the equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership. Men need to become aware about the orthodox assumptions, traditions and attitudes which prevent the equal participation of women.

A study carried out by Mahmood (2002) stated that participation of women in domestic decision- making is known as a different aspect of their autonomy. For the purpose of this study he used the data of Pakistan fertility and family planning survey 1996-97 and examined the role of Pakistani women in household decision-making relative to their husband and children. The findings revealed that urban women have equal freedom and right to participate in the household matters while in rural areas husband and other family members play a predominant role in decision-making process. Even in rural areas women don't have the right to go out alone for the medical treatment or to buy any household item. The results indicated that urban women who have freedom to go outside alone have strong linkages with people than rural women and also more likely to participate in household decisions.

Parveen and Leonhauser (2004) studied the empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh, through the primary data. The data has been collected from the 156 respondents. This study showed that rural women were living in adverse situations and face inequality in every aspect of their lives. They belong to the most deprived section of the society. The empowerment indicators of this paper showed that 83% of the women just have a nominal economic contribution, 93% have a very poor to poor asset ownership, 73% have average participation in household decision-making and 72% have a moderate to high coping capacity to household shocks. This study was basically conceptualized three important dimensions of women's empowerment, these are: Socio-economic dimension, familial dimension, and psychological dimension. The increased role of women in household decision-making would enable them to improve their self-esteem, bargaining power, self- determination and social status. Women, who lived in the rural societies of the Bangladesh, usually are not allowed to interact with men other than their close family members, so women have very limited access to development. It is concluded that endorsement of women's freedom is necessary to make them capable of making their own decisions, to change their attitudes, to improve their social networks and reduce their level of poverty. Information technology, mass media, education, family planning program, poverty alleviation programs also have the potential to increase women's empowerment.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study tried to analyse the role of working and non-working women in the household decision-making process. Primarily the study is based on a secondary data which has been collected through various national and international journals. The review of literatures is based on various study tools such as surveys, interviews, personal observations which have been used by various scholars. The

tools like surveys and personal observations were very useful to examine the difference between the decision-making powers of working and non- working women.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women empowerment and decision-making supremacy

Progress in the women status played an important role in the removal of poverty, reduce the health issues, eliminate some restrictions on women etc. According to some studies empowerment of women is an important condition for the removal of world poverty, at individual level it helps to build a base for social change. There are mainly six indicators of women's empowerment, namely, contribution to household income, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision-making, perception of gender awareness and at last coping capacity to household shocks. It is observed that education, training and exposure to information media played a significant role to increase the women's empowerment. Some beneficial initiatives taken by the NGOs helped to improve the women's self- confidence, education level and skills (Parveen and Leonhauser, 2004).

In the era of globalization women's are taking part in the every field, they are wisely dealing with the each and every issue and obstacles of their life. Women are engaged in both the agricultural and nonagricultural occupation; their participation in non-agricultural activities has been increasing steadily. Education plays an important role behind the women's empowerment, most of the well-educated women preferred to do job after completing their study. But after marriage their preferences have been changed. Some of the studies have shown that some married women having the same qualification preferred to do work outside the home but some of them do not. After comparing the situations of married working and non-working women we observed that women's residential background, father's education, family size, age of the youngest child, income and occupation of the husband are the key factors which play a significant role behind their decision to work or not (Chaudhary,1977). An increasing role of female participation in the household decisions is an important indicator of women empowerment. A woman who actively participate in decision-making, control her life and environment, bring beneficial changes in the society is more empowered than women who do not. Various studies conducted on the developing countries have shown that decisions regarding the large or daily purchase have been taken with the participation of both husband and wife, while most of the women have taken decisions about their health care but women's freedom of movement is restricted and their interaction with the family members is controlled by husband and in-laws (Kishor and Subaiya, 2005).

Figure 1 has shown the women participation in decision-making at the all India level. The figure reveals that women belonging to Meghalaya district have the greatest supremacy in the household decision-making among all the Indian states; in this state near about 80 per cent women actively participate in the decision-making. Further, chart presents that the situation of women of north east states except Tripura is much better than the women belonging to other states of India. It is downhearted to know that in West Bengal, Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir participation of women in decision-making is very low, it merely stands between 20-30 per cent in these states. It is observed that the decision-making power of women is an important element of women empowerment. Social, economic and cultural participation of women is significantly considered in all societies. The higher level of education and increasing participation of women in all sectors has

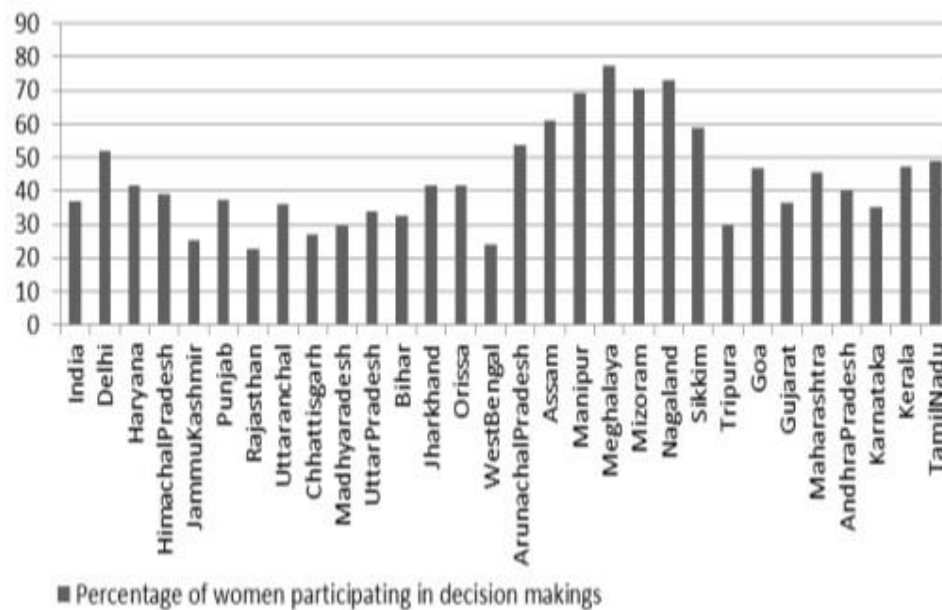


Figure 1: Women Participation in decision-making in India

improved the decision-making power of women. It is observed that women’s involvement in household decisions increases with their educational status and good occupational status, educated women give their suggestions on some important issues and also help to build the confidence of their husbands rather than uneducated and non- working women. In developing countries women are not much educated so they have the less decision-making power than men. It is observed that the in some cases employment status of women does not play much crucial role in household decision-making but the employment status of men influences household decisions. Mostly men are more responsible to make a decision about buying a vehicle or electrical equipment. Some decisions such as children’s education, children’s marriage and going on a trip have been taken with the opinions of children. Decisions about the family size, family relationships, names of the children, buying a new house have been taken by the both men and women’s participation (Kiani, 2012). A study based on primary data conducted by Mekonnen and Asrese (2014) found that women have the more power over the situations of their daily lives, but have the very little role in the important matters such as property purchase or the purchase of a new vehicle etc. Very few women have the right to take decision about their own health issues. The findings revealed that working women in better off annual income were more likely than non-working women to involve in households decisions (Baba et.al., 2015).

Role of electronic media and Self-help Groups

Electronic media has spread in the all over India and it provides new information about the outside world to its viewers. It is found that channels of electronic media such as cable television has greatly influenced the status of women in India. After the introduction of cable in India, there are notable changes in women’s attitude, since previously they are less likely to express a preference for sons

and are less likely to report that it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife (Baliyan, 2014). There are a number of mechanisms through which cable television has affected women's status, for example, television affected fertility by providing information on family planning services or changing the value of women's time. By watching cable television women's self confidence has also increased; they preferred to go outside without permission, and started participating in household decision-making. Television also gave exposure to rural women by providing information about fashion and latest trends, rural women started following urban life style, behaviour and values. The decision-making process of both husband and wife also influenced by media exposure. Some studies have shown that illiterate husband and wife prefer male child, while the educated husband and wife are preference-free. The education level of women also played a significant role in the men's decision of limiting family size (Jensen and Oster, 2009).

It is observed that self help groups played an important role in the women empowerment. Data collected from the focus group discussions and interviews revealed that a drastic change has been noticed in the women decision-making power before joining the self help group and ten years of after joining the group. The study has shown that after joining the group women are become more conscious about their health and their daughter's education. They also preferred small family size and taking more decisions on family planning than past. Women has also started go alone of outside the village for the work of self help groups. The study focused on the three types of empowerment: social, economic and psychological. Social empowerment includes health, freedom, education, lack of discrimination against daughters, ability to solving the social issues, and decision-making power within household. Women's control over family resources like property, house, income and role in home regarding economic decision-making comes under the economic empowerment. Psychological empowerment comprised self confidence, moral support to family, ability to overcome problems and strong determination etc. that after joining the self help groups women's decision-making power has been increased, it is also noted that the decision-making power of schedule caste women is more than the other social groups (Pandey, 2017).

Findings of the study

In this research we compared the household decision-making power of working and non working women by using the secondary data of various journals and magazines. In the study we found that majority of the women face the ignorance in the decision-making process and the important decisions in family have been taken by the men. In most of the families men were the head except single women and widows, who plays significant role in the household decision-making. Participation of women in decision-making was very low due to low level of education, lack of confidence, less knowledge of technical skills, busy in doing housework, lack of knowledge of current issues and traditional culture. Women have the power to take the decisions about her business but their views are neglected in other matters. It is observed that education played an important role to empower woman, the household decision-making supremacy of educated and working woman is much greater than the uneducated and non-working woman.

CONCLUSION

In the Vedic period there was no kind of discrimination between the man and woman, they were treated equally. In those times, women took part in several professions and were free to marry according to their choice. In the Mughal period discrimination reached its peak, crime against

women became highly dominant and they were started treating as object. Gradually with the passage of time position of women changed considerably, they started working outside and establish themselves in each and every field. But in spite of increasing role of women in every field, their decisions are still ignored at household level. Husband or other members of the family do not give them equal importance in the decision-making. However, it is noticed that non-working and uneducated women face greater ignorance in the family as compared to educated and working women. It is also observed that with the increasing age and income wife has got the power to take economic and financial decisions of family. Thus, Nature of cooperation between husband and wife also affect the decisions on their family matters.

This study is supported by various national and international Scholars and authors in a variety of journals and magazines. A study by K.B. Shankar examined the women's empowerment and their decision- making positions regarding the sociological view. As per the author's view point Government need to have a system to asses' public sector performance from a perspective of gender equality. The above study is supported by several authors, name of some authors are Neil and Domingo, Punam, Saxena and Sharma, Baba et, al. etc in different national and international journals.

Although results of the study is contradicted by a few studies, in these studies it has been shown that the women and men equally participate in the household decision-making process and in some areas in the nuclear families non-working women uniformly participate in the household decision-making process as the working women do. These studies have been conducted by kumar and Maral (2015) in the project on Indian family system and decision-making power of working and non-working women and Titus et al. (2017) in the qualitative report of NOVA Southeastern University.

Suggestion

It is suggested that some NGOs, women help centre in the rural and urban areas should establish, which help to empower women in decision-making, investing and improving household livelihoods.

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