



Relevance of Women Rights in Rural Society; A Case Study of Sivasagar District, Assam

KEYWORDS

women rights, rural women, women empowerment.

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ABSTRACT *Violence and discrimination against women have been a common issue in our society, it is so deeply rooted that it is often not perceived as discrimination at all. To provide protection and justice to the women and to uplift their status various rights are being granted in national and international level, but their effective implementation is still questionable. In India about 48% women population resides in rural areas, it is observed that rural women are less aware about their rights than their urban counterparts. Measures should be taken by government and non government organisations to create awareness as well as guidance and counselling to rural women. There is urgent need for change in the attitude of society towards women as well as that of women towards themselves.*

INTRODUCTION:

No matter to which society a woman belongs, they share a common oppression, degradation, violence and discrimination in every step of life. "Except the additional capacity to give birth to children women's talent and capabilities are on par with those of man" (Rekha Roy, 2006). August Bebel (1879) said that "the first human being that tasted bondage was women. Women were a slave before the slave existed". He felt that physical inferiority and economic dependency were the root cause of women's subordination. In India women enjoyed a respectable position in the ancient period, but their status has undergone progressive deterioration with time. With the growth of the male chauvinism drawn from the socio-political arrangement of patriarchy which utilised the ground of culture and religion as a tool to subjugate women. For the upliftment of the women folks there arise the concept of women empowerment for sustainable development of the society. The great work of Mary Wallstone Craft from England (1778) 'A Vindication of the rights of Women' can be honoured as the foundation of women empowerment. Women have been denied their rights and shares through centuries, it is just from the 20th century that the women began to fight for their rights. Towards consistent dominance of women, the social framework of patriarchy has contributed a lot, a social set up where all the authority and power are bestowed upon the male member of the family as well as society. For all-round development of society men and women are equally important, but when it comes to give equal status to both the women folks are being ever neglected.

In 20th century the United Nation came up with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which brought a ray of hope for the women as well. The declaration defines the rights as fundamental, is the roots of our human nature and is the essence of humanity. In the Preamble it states that, "...Reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human rights of men and women...". Following the declaration others such as Declaration of Status of women 1967; Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979; Commission of Political Rights of Women 1953, came up on global basis for the sake of women. The influence of which reflected in India's Five Year Plan also, here mention may be made of various acts such as: Hindu Succession Act 1956, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Maternity Benefit

Act 1961, Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956, Domestic Violence Act 2005 etc.

In spite of all the rights legislations taken in favour of women, gender discrimination still exist even if it is claimed to be prohibited. The violent atrocities against women through- domestic violence, dowry, human trafficking, witch hunting, rape etc. shows that schemes for the protection and promotion of women rights have not been able to ensure justice to women citizen. The present study is an attempt to study the relevance of women rights in contemporary rural society.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the status of women in society.
2. To study the rate of awareness among women about their rights.
3. To study the relevance of Women Rights in rural society.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study is made to study the relevance of women rights in rural society. Sivasagar district of Assam is taken as the study area for the above study. As the Sivasagar district is a vast area, only three of its Development Blocks are selected for the study, namely Gaurisagar Development Block, Desangani Development Block and Sivasagar Development Block. From each development block one village is selected for the field study. Hundred women respondent were randomly interviewed for collecting primary data from every village. Secondary data are collected from various literature works as well as respective Development Block Offices.

OBSERVATION:

Table1: Age group of respondents

Age group	No. of respondents	Percentage
18-28	70	23.3
28-38	80	26.6
38-48	72	24.0
48-58	53	17.6
Above 60	25	8.3
Total	300	100

Regarding age of the respondents it is found that highest percentage of women belongs to the age group of 28-38 i.e. 26.6%, followed by 24% of 38-48 age group. Another 23.3% women are between the age of 18-28, 17.6% are of 48-58 years age, and 8.3% are found to be above 60 years of age among the respondents.

Table 2: Marital status of respondents

Marital status	No. of respondents	Percentage
Married	145	48.3
Unmarried	98	32.6
Divorced	11	3.6
Widow	46	15.3
Total	300	100

From the survey it is observed that 48.3% among the interviewed women are married, 32.6% are not married. Another 15.3% respondents are widow women, while very less percentage of 3.6% women are legally separated or divorced.

Table 3: Educational status of the respondents

Educational status	No. of respondents	Percentage
Below 10 th standard	28	9.3
Matriculation	52	17.3
Higher secondary	134	44.6
Graduate	66	22.0
Post graduate	20	6.6
Total	300	100

Regarding the educational background it is found that a good number of women are educated. The educational qualification of most of the women is up to higher secondary level i.e. 44.6%, the number of graduates share 22% among the total. 17.3% are observed to have matriculated and 9.3% could not complete their studies up to matriculation. Very few women are found to have done their post graduation i.e. 6.6%.

Table 4: Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	No. of respondents	Percentage
Govt. Job	52	17.3
Self employed	20	6.6
House wife	187	62.3
Student	41	13.6
Total	300	100

As stated by the respondents it is observed that large section of women are home maker which is found to be 62.3%. Women engaged in government jobs constitute 17.3%, while a small section of respondents are self employed i.e. 6.6%. Another 13.6% respondents are undergoing academic courses. The number of married working women is relatively less than housewives.

Table 5: Decision making authority of respondents

Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Mother	29	9.6
Husband	130	43.3

Father	106	35.3
Jointly	35	11.6
Total	300	100

When the respondents were interviewed regarding the decision making authority in family, it is observed that husbands take decisions of about 43.3 % women. Father take decision of 35.3% women, it is also found that mother helps in decision making of 9.6% respondents. Another small fraction of about 11.6% respondents take their life decision jointly by discussing with husband and wife.

Table 6: Opinion on facing domestic violence

category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	86	28.6
No	139	46.3
Can't say	75	25.0
Total	300	100

Regarding occurrence of domestic violence it is observed that most of the respondents are not facing any kind of domestic violence about 46.3%. But it is also found that about 28.6% women are being victim of domestic violence in one way or the other. 25% respondents among the total were not willing to open up and give a definite opinion, it may be due to their privacy concern.

Table 7: Awareness about Women Rights

Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	112	37.3
No	80	26.6
Indifferent	108	36.0
Total	300	100

When interviewed about awareness among women regarding their rights, it is noticed that 37.3 % women are aware about their rights. 26.6% respondents are not well aware about women rights, while another 36% women feel that so called rights of women has nothing to do in our social set up.

Table 8: Respondent's access to mass media

category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Print media	42	14.0
Electronic media	86	28.6
Both print & electronic media	172	57.31
Total	300	100

Regarding the availability of mode of mass communication it is observed that, they have remarkable access to such mediums. 57.3% women have access to both print media such as newspaper and electronic media like TV sets, Radio etc. 28.6% respondents are interested only in electronic media, while 14% women are confined to print media only.

SUGGESTION:

1. Measures should be taken to reduce economic dependency of women.
2. To create awareness among women about their rights, through government and non government organisation and mass media.
3. in the mindset of society as well as of women regard-

ing their status in society.

4. Women should speak out their problems that they face and seek legal protection if needed, rather than tolerating them in silence.

CONCLUSION:

With the development of modern society women had attained a remarkable progress in almost every field, be it science and technology, art and culture, corporate sector etc. In our society also a good number of women are well educated and socially conscious, but it is true that there is a fraction of women that are still the grass under stone. Gender discrimination and violence against women still prevail in our society. Giving equal rights to women and prohibition of all forms of discrimination against women by global and national organisations are confined to declarations only. The rights and protections should be made accessible to each and every women irrespective of their socio economic status. Moreover legal provisions for women do not grant these rights to them unless they are aware of them and claim them. Both men and women should act according to the obligations imposed on them by these rights. It is high time that society should change their attitude towards women and think beyond the periphery of patriarchy. Psychological security, support and counselling should be provided to women specially in rural society to understand themselves in more realistic and progressive way and to respect themselves being women. Special trainings and economic aid should be given by the government, which would help the rural women to engage themselves in small scale cottage industries and become economically independent.

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