



NEGATION OF BASIC RIGHTS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF AGED WOMEN

Dr. Sohini

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Techhonology, Roorkee, Uttrakhand,India.

Abstract

With the population aging and changing socio- economic processes, the status of aged people, particularly the aged women in their respective families and in communities has changed. As the women outlive men in almost every part of the globe, they are more prone to the attack of ageing. The present study attempts to examine that how the aged women are negated from the day to day basic rights and how the negation of these rights poses serious problems for the aged women. The Sample of the study consist of 120 aged women (60 years and above). An interview schedule and observation method is used as tools of data collection. The analysis of the data reveals that the aged women were suffering from negation of different forms of basic rights such as availability of social security schemes, access to proper food, adequate medical facilities and health care and right to live decently with respect. Inhuman treatment and torture by the family members, death of the husband and no financial support to live a life in peaceful manure is reported by the respondents. Due to illiteracy, poverty, lack of knowledge about their rights and less exposure to mainstream of society, the aged women are even negated from their basic rights.

Key Words: *Aged Women, Basic Rights, Negation.*

Introduction

The group of ageing people is now the world's fastest growing population group. In India also the size of the aged population is growing fast. They are the fastest growing section of the society (Age Well Research & Advocacy Centre 2014). The increased life expectancy in almost every part of the country makes the life of aged people more difficult. Also the changing processes such as industrialization, urbanization, modernization and secularization which began during the British period and developed further after India's independence had affect the role and status of the aged people (Mishra 2005). Traditionally in India, the aged people enjoyed power, autonomy and control in their family life but now they become the gambit of the same power by their own family members. In the present time, the aged are not provided with care and back support from the family and altogether feel socially neglected.

In spite of having many special arrangements for the protection of the aged people, their situation is not good and they are on the verge of isolation and marginalization (Mandal 2011). They are facing distinctive problems such as discrimination, poverty, abuse and neglect that severely restrict their rights and their contribution in the society (Fredvang and Biggs 2012). At this age, when they need family support the most, many of the aged have to live on their own, particularly the aged women whose condition are getting worse day by day. Even the basic rights of many of them are not addressed and often negated due to gender and age discrimination (Age Well Research & Advocacy Centre 2011).

However, if the basic rights which concern with the people's primary material and non-material needs are not provided, no human being can lead a respectful survival (humanright.is). The basic rights such as right to food, clothing, shelter, etc are the most basic tenets of human's well being without which life of human is not possible. Food, cloth and shelter to the people of the country, is a criterion which measures the progress that a country has achieved in its democratic credentials (Nasre 2011). Therefore, it can be concluded that the vulnerability of the aged women will be doubled or tripled if they are confronted with the negation of day to day basic rights. Hence there is a growing need to better understand the social position and rights of the aged women.

Objectives of the Study

In the above context, the present study is an attempt

1. To examine the social and economic profile of the aged women.
2. To examine that how the aged women are negated from the day to day basic rights.
3. To examine that how the negation of these rights poses serious problems for the aged women.

Methodology of the Study

The study has been carried out in Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh in India, which is purposively selected for the study. Five wards have been randomly selected from the tehsil of Jhansi district. The sample of the present study consists of one hundred and twenty aged women who were selected from the 5 wards (namely Bahar Sainyer Gate, Talpura-1st, Simrada, Khusipura and Bhattagaon) of Jhansi. The respondents for the field study have been selected through convenience sampling, meaning thereby the aged women who were interviewed are selected merely on the basis of availability.



In order to have an account of the social and economic position of the aged women in Jhansi District as well as to understand the negation of rights experienced by the aged women, both primary and secondary data have been employed. The primary data have been collected through semi-structured interview schedule which helps to tap the subjective perception of the respondents.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The social demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Out of the total one hundred and twenty respondents the majority of the respondent's (62.5%) were in the age group of (60 -70) years. In terms of caste distribution the respondents belonging to the Scheduled Caste formed the highest percentage (45%) of the total respondents. Further majority of them (58.33%) are living in the same household with their married children (daughter or son) but have separate kitchen.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Age		
60-69	75	62.5
70-70	32	26.66
80 and above	13	10.83
Total	120	100
Caste		
General	32	26.66
Schedule Caste	54	45
Schedule Tribe	13	10.83
Other Backward Class	21	17.5
Total	120	100
Living Status		
Alone	63	52.5
With Spouse	21	17.5
With Married Children	70	58.33
With Others	06	05
Total	120	100

Table 2. Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Marital Status		
Married	38	31.66
Widow	79	65.83
Single/Divorced	03	2.5
Total	120	100
Educational Status		
Primary	31	25.83
Secondary	09	7.5
Graduation	02	1.66
Illiterate	68	56.66
Total	120	100
Working Status		
Working	62	51.66
Non Working	58	48.33
Total	120	100
Monthly Income		
Less than 5000	69	57.5
5000 to 10,000	07	5.83
Above 10,000	00	00
No Income	24	20



Total	120	100
Dependency Status		
Fully Dependent	40	33.33
Partially Dependent	27	22.5
Independent	53	44.1
Total	120	100

Table 2 details the socio-economic profile of the respondents. It shows that out of the total number of respondents, majority of the respondents (65.83%) were widow. Similar features were reported by Ara Begum (2014) that the aged women live longer than men and mostly live alone as aged widow. It is because in India, generally, men marry women younger than themselves (Ravishankar 2010). The second majority is of married respondents (31.66%) and there were negligible percentage of respondents (2.5%) who were single or divorced. In regards to educational status there was higher percentage of respondents (56.66) who were illiterate. Moreover it was observed that most of these illiterate respondents basically belong to rural areas but few years back they were migrated and settled in urban areas. With respect to working status of the respondents there were maximum respondents (51.66%) who were working in different sectors to earn their livelihood.

However, greater number of these respondents belongs to the age group of (60-69) years who are working. It was also seen that there were higher majority of the respondents (57.5%) who were having monthly income less than Rupees 5,000 and (20%) of respondents who were having no income. The respondents who received monthly income between Rupees (5,000-10,000) constitute a very small minority (5.83%). Further the table shows that out of the total, majority of the respondents (41.1%) were independent and have no economic support from the family members or from any relatives. Thus it can be analyzed that there was higher percentage of aged women who were negated from their economic rights with no income or having low incomes of their own. It is also obvious that monthly income ranging from Rupees 1,000 to Rupees 5,000 is quite low to sustain a normal life in today's time.

There were also (22.5%) of respondents who were partially dependent on their married children for the economic securities. There were (33.33%) of respondents who were completely dependent on their married children or on some of the charitable trust. Most of these respondents who had to depend on others for their daily maintenance reported that their situation is worse and they were more discriminated economically. In their later stage of life they had to face many hardships like financial and health problems. Such being the case, women without husband encounter additional problems and sufferings which add to their already crippled life after the death of husband making it difficult for many widowed women to bear the burden of looking after themselves for long time. Likewise observation was also made by Mohapatra (2011) in study on problems of aged widows in Orissa. There is growing number of aged women who are suffering from triple negation and abuse on account of gender, age, and widowhood.

Negation of Right to Social Security Schemes

In regards to availability of social security schemes for the aged people it was found that 39.16% of respondents were availing the old age pension/ retirement pension/ widow pension/ *Annapurna* scheme. But it was also found that still there were significant percentage (60.83%) of respondents who were not availing any of these schemes. These respondents stated that they heard about the social security schemes for the aged people such as national or state old age pension scheme, *Annapurna* scheme, widow pension, etc. But due to illiteracy, old age, lack of exposure and their rural background they are unaware of the procedure involved in accessing these schemes. They had no Knowledge about the complete steps needed for the pension scheme.

Further, the respondents complained that the they were not the beneficiary of any scheme run for them by the state or central government due to malpractices of the clerks at the local level in the government offices. These lower level clerks were not at all helpful and co-operative in providing the detail information regarding this matter. Most of the aged women reported that the officials responsible for this task, asked to pay commission to get them registered for the pension schemes. They mentioned that somehow, 2-3 times they managed to fill up the pension form but their name was not included in the pension list. They said that it was the corrupt mind and materialistic outlook of the lower level officials involved in applying and availing of the scheme that put them off. Only those people succeeded who had close contacts with the near and dear ones of these officials or the one who had a source of some powerful person. In 2009 same observation were also reported by Prashad and Komali in their study on Implementation of Old Age Pension Scheme. They found that there were 92.3% of the respondents who viewed that they had been filling the forms multiple times but could not get their names included in the list. Meanwhile the respondents who were receiving the old age pension argued that at present the pension amount is too less and insufficient especially for the widow respondents who do not have any other financial support. Many of these beneficiaries



narrated that even this minimal amount of rupees 300 is not easily available to them. They felt helpless and had to please the decision makers to get any profit of the pension scheme.

Consequently it can be observed that the aged women were at a disadvantage for not receiving the benefits of pension schemes. In spite of fulfilling the eligibility of age, having poor health status and being from lower socio-economic strata of the society, they were negated from the right to social security schemes for them by the government.

Negation of Right to Proper Food

While accessing the availability of proper food, there was significant percentage of respondents (61.66%) who were not getting proper food. Most of the respondents specified that they were struggling for proper food in old age. They reported that in today's high cost of living and standard, even getting a normal food to eat is a big problem. Some of the respondents who were fully dependent on their married children or on government run institution also reported that most of the time they were refused to get full diet according to their health conditions by their own family members. Their own children did not give them giving adequate food to eat, and suggest them that that they should not eat much in old age, a little food is enough to keep going.

Moreover, the respondents who were living alone and dependent on some of charitable trust complained that the regular meal service was not provided to them on time. They had to wait and stand in a long queue for food and many times it happened that the food got over and they had to sleep without any dinner. They further replied that 'it is just enough if we get two times meal a day, we do not think about high calories, protein and other nutrients in food'.

However out of the total 61.66% of the respondents there were (70.27%) of respondents who were widow and were negated from healthy and balanced diet. Most of these aged widows mentioned that after the death of their husband they had to face many hardships. They had to struggle harder to arrange two square meals a day and had to do physical labor whole day. No financial support from the family members, as well as from the government and the social-cultural taboos of the society restricts them to take healthy and nutritious food. They take some selected and cheap diet which contains few rise and cheap vegetables at a fixed time. They were negated from nutritious foods which are rich in proteins and vitamins such as milk, curd, sweets, non-veg, etc.

Further the findings of demonstrate that most of the respondents were negated from access to proper food. Majority of the respondents did not get sufficient food and were physically weak to move and work properly, hence marginalized in their own family. Therefore the lives of these aged women particularly the aged widow, without a balance and regular diet has deteriorated into a spiral of hardship and deprivation. Though, in the fundamental rights it is mentioned by the Indian constitution that each citizen has a right to life but what does the right to life mean to an individual who is weakened with hunger, who is negated from the most basic right (right to food), without which human survival is not possible. Thus it is the right of each and every aged people to have regular access to adequate and nutritious food for an active and healthy life.

Negation of Right to Medical Care and Facilities

While analyzing the data regarding access to medical facilities and health care it was found that only 46.5% respondents had access to medical facilities and health care. Whereas there were high percentage of respondents (51.5%) who were devoid of access to necessary medicines, health care and medical facilities for various diseases. Most of these aged respondents reported that they were they were suffering from poor health such as osteoporosis, hypertension, diabetes, etc but unable to take proper medical treatment as they were poor enough and had no financial and social support from their adult children to afford the medical services of the private clinic. Some respondents said that they were living with their children in the same house but were accommodated in a separate room, outside the compact house. Even during the severe illness they were negated from medical care and attention by their own son and daughter-in-law.

However the respondents also complained about the medical facilities provided to them by the government. They remarked that they usually want to visit government run medical centers such as community health centers or the district hospital for medical treatment but unable to do so because their children did not help them. If they visit alone then they had to face many problems like lack of access to public transportation services in the communities which mostly restricted their mobility, waiting for long time in a queue in hospital, misbehavior of the staff, receiving one type of medicine for all medical problems, ignorance of proper attention by the medical staff. Few of the respondents also responded that also due to lack of knowledge and illiteracy they unable to avail the medical facilities provided for them by the government.

Negation of Right to Live Decently with Respect in the Family

In terms of respect and care from the family member more than half of the respondents (59.16%) reveal that they did not get



valuable care and respect from their children as they use to provide for their own parents. Most of the respondents who were fully dependent on their children stated that they were not at all happy with the attitude of their children. Their children, especially sons and daughters-in-law, did not respect them and invariably tortured them, just for nothing. Further they remarked that verbal abuse and misbehaving for the food is common scene in their routine life. Mostly they were made to feel that they were useless and unwanted members in the family, because of their old age. Again a large number of respondents reported that they usually suffer from domestic violence. They specified that due to old age they are no longer considered as physically useful or income generating person in their family so it very difficult for son's new family to adjust with their old parents and brittleness increases in the interpersonal relationships which give rise to domestic violence and different forms of elder abuse.

Moreover, there were also many respondents who opined that the children of present scenario had neglecting and unfavorable attitude towards the aged people. They stated that earlier the aged people commanded a lot of respect and attention. They played an important role in all family matters, including religious ceremonies and marriage. But now due to the fragmentation of joint families, materialistic outlook of the individuals and expansion of women employment had come into existence because of which children are becoming selfish, money loving and disobedient day by day. They have no etiquettes for the aged particularly for the aged women who were economically and physical dependent. However, there were few respondents who remained silent regarding the question of respect and care provided by their children. Finally the finding shows that loss of ability and the increasing dependency of the respondents is one of the major reasons for negation of right to live decently with respect in their own family. The respondents face neglect and disrespect because of their economic dependency on their children for their daily maintenance and due to the adjustment problems with their grown-up children. Also the transformation of joint family system to nuclear family, the modern lifestyle and selfish attitude of the young working children is responsible for the negation of right to respect.

Conclusion

The present findings indicate that as age increases, the aged women particularly the widow aged women had to face negation from multiple rights. Most of the aged women selected for the survey were found to be illiterate and that due to higher prevalence of illiteracy, lack of exposure and lack of knowledge they found to be the victim of negation of right to social securities. But it was observed that the main reason behind the negation of right to social security was the rude and disoblged behavior of the clerks at the local level. Financial weakness, lack of familial and social support makes their life more vulnerable, being negated from right to food and medical facilities. Moreover it was found that the respondents were also suffering from negation of right to live decently with respect in their own family because of their economic dependency and the breakdown of joint families. It was also noticed that being widow and aged the women face many challenges, fighting for individual basic rights such as right to economic and social security, right to get care and respect, freedom from abuse and ill-treatment by the family members.

Reference

1. Age Well Foundation. 2014. "Human Rights of Older People in India- A National Study." New Delhi.
2. Age Well Foundation. 2011. Human Rights of Older Persons in India- A National Study." New Delhi.
3. Begaum, Ferdous Ara. 2014. "Abuse and Well Being of Older Women." *Help Age India Research and Development Journal* 20 (2): 33-40.
4. Fredvang, Marthe and Simon Biggs. 2012. The Rights of Older Persons. Social Policy Working Paper No.16. Centre for Public Policy. Brotherhood of St Laurence and University of Melbourne. Melbourne.
5. Mandal, Shashi Nath. 1999. "Protection of Rights of Old Age Person in India: A Challenging Facet of Human Rights." *International Research Journal* 11 (5): 587-985.
6. Mishra, Anindya Jayanta. 2005. "The Elderly in India: A Study of Old Age Home Residents in Orissa." PhD diss. Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India
7. Mohapatra, Tanuja. 2011. "Problems of the Elderly Widows in Odisha: An Empirical Study." *Indian Journal of Gerontology* 25 (1): 89-110.
8. Nasre, Madhuri Yogesh. 2011. The Right To Food, Clothing and Shelter- Step Towards Healthy Nation. *Indian Stream Research Journal* 1 (6): 1-4.
9. Prashad, Devi Salomi and N. Komali. 2009. "Implementation of Old Age Pension Scheme in Visakhapatnam District." *Journal of Rural Development* 28 (4): 439-449.
10. Ravishankar, A. K. 2010. "Ageing and Family Support of Elderly in South India." *Indian Journal of Gerontology* 24 (4): 482-500.