ABSTRACT

Examining the relationship of women to economy is central to women's studies. Economy is a very important aspect of our life. It determines a person's position in society and is believed to give him / her power and dominance. There is a widespread belief that women in India have been economically dependent on their male relations from times immemorial. The society has perceived women to be confined to house-keeping, making no considerable economic contributions for the management and up-keep of family life. It is being argued that the modernization process has improved their employment position by providing them educational opportunities and granting them certain basic rights. However, this description of women's contribution to human society and economy is a highly misleading assessment of the historical role of women. The modernization process has inducted a considerable number of women belonging to upper and middle classes of society into the salaried class. However, the overwhelming majority of our rural women have historically played a significant role in the development of economy and society. For centuries they have been performing multiple and major economic roles both within and outside the
family. These women have always worked larger hours than men have, but their work has always remained hidden and has never been recognised nor have they been paid at par with their male counterparts.

One of the crucial methodological problems pertaining to women's household work is what has been called by leading scholars of women's studies as 'invisibility phenomenon'. As a matter of fact, women are engaged in a complex web of household activities and there are no readymade criteria on the basis of which women's household work can be conceptualized, defined, classified, quantified and documented. Women’s household work is actually comprised of a plethora of activities. These activities consume the time and energy of women, but owing to long-drawn-out ideological and societal moorings and predilections, these activities are not deemed to be productive or remunerative. Therefore, they do not figure in any governmental or non-governmental analysis and evaluation of work, e.g. women prepare food, clean and maintain dwelling places, reproduce and rear children, maintain social relationships, cater to common friends and relatives, care for elderly people, exchange presents on festivals and ritual occasions, extend invitations and provide hospitality, fetch water and fire wood and engage in multifaceted
works concerning their husbands. Women’s contributions in these and similar activities is of immense significance for the very survival of social, political, economic, moral and civilizational aspects of human existence. These activities are of foundational importance.

The household is the reference point of women’s lives. Women are deeply inter-twinned with the household. Sociologists and anthropologists have been perennially studying the institution of household. The earlier sociological and anthropological focus on household did try to analyse its role in forging kin solidarity, socialisation, internalization of cultural values, norms etc. However, presently Sociologists are emphasizing the role of the household within the larger socio-economic order. The macro features of national and international socio-economic order such as systems of production, exchange of resources and access to resources do ultimately impinge on the shape of households in modern societies. The productive activities and incomes of the households are largely determined by these systemic features of the situation. However, within the precincts of the households the position of women is additionally determined by a host of factors; for example, her being in urban or rural sector, her belonging to a lower caste or higher caste, her coming from an upper class or a lower class, her being landed or
landless etc., are vital factors that determine the position of a woman within a given household. However, what is of most crucial importance in determining the status of a woman within a household is her job or career or occupation and its net cash-value.

Work is the ultimate determining factor in the modern household. Work is a defining, a characterising and an identifying force in the modern world. It shapes our physical and emotional needs, establishes our identity, and determines our economic position and hierarchies us in the complex web of social stratification. Our work determines the conditions under which we spend our countless productive hours. Thus work is the most important determinant of our quality of life.

Work as productive economic activity has always determined the social and political position of a person. For example, shorn of all meta-physical and normative trappings the ancient Indian four fold division of society was based on the nature and type of work done by numerous castes and sub-castes. However, with increasing industrialization and technologisation, the scope and extent of work has become multi-complex. Technology has opened up a vast area of sophisticated managerial, administrative and supervisory jobs in the fields of engineering, commerce, trade, management etc., that we
need highly accomplished specialists for these modern jobs. In the modern economies of Western Europe, Northern America and South Eastern parts of Asia, highly complex and exceedingly technologically sophisticated jobs are being created day in and day out.

The highly sophisticated industrial and technological occupations in Kashmir are yet to emerge. Even after the end of twentieth century, the economy of Kashmir is based on agriculture and handicrafts. It is categorically a pre-industrial, a pre-technological, and a pre-modern economy. In this economy women have been making a highly significant contribution both in the agricultural and handicraft sectors.

The role of Kashmiri women in agricultural sector has always been of vital significance. Historically speaking they have always been engaged in seeding and weeding, transplanting, transporting and collecting operations of agricultural produce, apart from engaging themselves in allied activities such as animal husbandry, poultry, fetching of fire wood and water etc. The urban women especially in Srinagar city have traditionally been actively engaged in various handicrafts such as shawl, Namdah, chain stitch, Crewel, Gubbah, shahtoosh and pushmina spinning, carpet weaving, papier-machie etc.
For centuries Kashmir has earned tremendous fame due to its handicrafts. The beauty of Kashmir is incomplete without a mention of its handicrafts. This industry is one of the big employers of the State. There are around 3 Lac artisans involved in different crafts. Though both men and women are equally involved in producing marvelous pieces of exquisite quality and craftsmanship, there are certain crafts in which women's role is predominant and in some crafts men are mostly predominant. However, the irony is that the number of women vis-à-vis men in a particular craft is not known despite the fact that State Directorate of Handicrafts has worked out an overall estimation of the artisans involved in the handicraft industry. In addition to this there are a number of artisans a particularly woman who have adopted it as a household occupation and whose strength is virtually difficult to assess. The handicraft industry of Kashmir is an export-oriented industry. It contributes a lot to State Economy and earns a considerable amount of foreign exchange for the nation. The present study attempts to highlight the role played by women in the Handicraft Sector.

The rural women's work on family farms for long hours and also in handicraft sector, particularly in slack season, cannot be overlooked. At the same time, it is
imperative to know how does an urban woman, (usually an illiterate, semi educated or at times educated to a certain level), earn to supplement the family income. The contribution of these urban women to their family income, particularly in a patriarchal society, that discourages the freedom and liberty to women, always remains invisible. Therefore, the present study is an effort towards an analysis and classification of the ‘invisibility phenomenon’ of urban women’s work; its nature and its relationship with the family income in particular and the total state economy in general. The focus of the present study is the urban Muslim women of Srinagar city. These women are mostly clustered in the high-density areas of old city.

Objectives of the Study

Though the broad research objective of the present evaluation was to throw light on the role played by women in the Handicraft Sector, the specific objectives around which the present study was built are:

- To analyse the socio-economic and educational background of artisan women.
- To analyse the nature and type of work done by them.
➢ To discover the wages/earnings of the female artisans engaged in different handicrafts.
➢ To ascertain the control over the earnings of the female artisans.
➢ To explore the conditions under which the female artisans have opted for this role.
➢ To analyse the duality of role and the problems faced by the female artisans.
➢ To analyse the role of female artisans in the decision-making process of the family.
➢ To study the perceptions/aspirations of the female artisans vis-à-vis job satisfaction, rights of Muslim women, education and changing role of women.

**Research Procedure Followed**

Keeping in view the objectives of the study an elaborate research design was prepared and executed. The various aspects of the research design pertained to the important demographic features of the universe/sample frame, sampling procedure, research tools, data administration procedures and other details.

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the combined method of both quantitative and qualitative in-depth studies was used. A sample of two hundred artisan women was selected randomly from the down town area of
Srinagar, 190 artisan women for quantitative analysis and 10 women for case studies. For the first level of the study i.e. quantitative analysis, interview schedule with both closed and open ended questions was constructed and administered to the respondents. The researcher personally interviewed all the respondents and recorded their responses. For the second level i.e. the qualitative analysis, case studies were conducted. For this focus interviews of artisan women were held in their own settings. Some middlemen/dealers were also interviewed in order to understand the working pattern of the industry.

Findings:

The analysis of the quantitative data was divided into three sections.

Section I namely 'Artisan Women: Socio-economic and Educational Background' revealed that these women came from lower socio-economic background. Most of them were either illiterate or semi literate. However, the educational level of unmarried female artisans was marginally higher than married female artisans. This is so owning to the fact that overwhelming majority of the female artisans were in the age group of 15-25 years and therefore they had been exposed relatively to higher education during the last two decades of the previous century. The analysis further revealed that 63.41
% husbands of married female artisans, 75.92% fathers and 100 % mothers of unmarried artisan women were totally illiterate and remaining 36.59 % husbands of married female artisans and 24.8% fathers of unmarried female artisans were barely literate or semi literate. The husbands and fathers in respective categories were either petty businessmen or small shopkeepers or artisans. Majority of the husbands of married artisan women and fathers of the unmarried artisan women were in the lower income group earning between rupees 1,000 to 3,000 per month.

Majority of the female artisans had one male earning member. However in case of unmarried female artisans majority had more than one female earning member, whereas married female artisans had only one female earning member in majority of the cases, i.e. themselves. This phenomenon leads to a disparity in total respective incomes of married and unmarried female artisans. Whereas majority of the married artisans live within the income group of Rs. 3001-5000 per month, the unmarried female artisans live within relatively higher income group of Rs. 5001-7000 per month.

The study further showed that the tradition of joint family system is on the verge of extinction in view of the fact that about 87.89 % female artisans lived in nuclear
type of family units. Most of the family units comprised of 3 to 4 family members. However, the patriarchal system in these families remained, by and large intact. Most of the families of these female artisans were headed by male members.

The section II namely 'Artisan Women: Work and Family' bring out that most of the female artisans of Srinagar were engaged in embroidery, and spinning operations. Coming from a lower socio-economic background these poor and illiterate artisans are engaged in long daily grinds that fetch them little in terms of monetary benefits. Most of them work from 6 to 12 hours daily and their incomes range from Rs. 700 upto Rs. 1500 per month. Even this meagre income is very vital for the upkeep of their hearths. Their entire earnings are spent on domestic requirements. As all these artisans are working in un-organised sector, the mode of payment is completely unregulated and depends upon respective bargaining capacity of both the artisan women and the middlemen. A large chunk of the profits is appropriated by the middlemen and the wholesale dealers and exporters. These artisan women are conscious of their low wages, but still continue with their jobs in view of the fact that they have no better alternative to go in for. In response to the question as to whether they were satisfied with jobs the
majority of them nod affirmatively, but a deeper probing of their conditions revealed that they would readily go in for a better option, only if it was available. These artisan women are over burdened with their handicraft work coupled with their multiple domestic responsibilities. The married artisans are further over-loaded with such duties as child-rearing, cooking, washing, cleaning and other chores of day-to-day maintenance. Consequently the married women artisans have less leisure time in comparison to unmarried ones.

The married artisan women who do find some leisure time spend it by taking rest/nap after the lunch. Whereas the unmarried artisan women chat, relax, watch TV etc. during their leisure time. The outings of the artisan women consist of going to nearby market, visiting relatives or attending marriage parties etc. They go for outing either once in a week or once in a month. However, a considerable percentage of female artisans go for outings either occasionally or rarely and 3.15% female artisan women never come out of their homes. Majority of them reported that they never visit any picnic spot. To know whether the female artisans take any part in the decision-making process of the family, a wide gap was found between the responses of married and unmarried artisan women. The data reveals that 39.02% married
artisan women do take part in the decision making process whereas almost the same percentage i.e. 36.58% just give their consent. The majority of the unmarried artisans do not take part in any decision making process and it is mostly their fathers who take decisions either independently or in certain cases seek the advice of their mothers.

Section III namely 'Artisan Women: Perceptions & Aspirations' yielded the following responses:

With regard to gender discrimination, 61.05% women artisans confirmed that gender discrimination does exist within home and society, and the rest of the respondents either denied this fact or did not say anything in this regard. It seemed that they had internalized the traditional values too strongly to give any positive or negative response. The perceptions and aspirations of the unmarried artisans were more egalitarian than married artisan women as majority of them advocated that husband and wife should have an equal status within the family.

Significant change was not found in the perceptions of married and unmarried artisan women with regard to the factors that could have fetched them a better job and also regarding the job opportunities available to men and women. Further, majority of the respondents favoured
handicraft sector to be the best that could have happened to them within the four walls of their home, but at the same time none of them wanted their son or daughter to follow their profession except a small percentage of 7.31 percent married artisan women. Most of them wished their children to be highly educated leaving their final placement to be decided by fate/God.

Furthermore, contrary to the hypothesis, the female artisans were aware about their rights, but most of them preferred to go by customary law.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The purpose of including case studies was not to give any statistical precision, but to give a feel about the life of the artisan women. Therefore, the case-material is presented in a biographical form, which is quite revealing and self-explanatory. A gist of the interviews of the middle-men is also presented in the same form.

These individual case histories confirm our findings from quantitative analysis. The main conclusions one can draw from these cases are:

1. The artisan women mostly come from lower economic and educational background.
2. Artisan women do the handicraft work due to economic necessity. When male members earn less, then it is the
responsibility of a woman to supplement and raise the economic status of the family.

3. The day in the life of most of the artisan women is quite hectic. Her domestic and handicraft work goes on simultaneously and she hardly finds anytime to rest.

4. Women are aware about their exploitation and inadequate wages, but cannot stop work as it is important and vital for their very sustenance.

An interface with the agents and dealers revealed that they enjoy the monopoly of the trade, the women artisans are the real workers and the agents, merchants and the exporters are the exploiters. All of them take their share of exploitation. The agents' share is also limited. Big merchants and the exporters are the real beneficiaries.