



SOCIAL EXCLUSION: SOME NARRATIVES OF ELDERLY WOMEN

Dr. Sohini

Dept. of Humanities and social Sciences, Indian Institute of Techhonology, Roorkee, Uttrakhand, India.

Abstract

The cases of social exclusion against the elderly are rising fast in India. Today they are facing multiple problems like, misbehavior, inhuman treatment, cheating and even physical torture by their own children. This study makes in-depth interviews with the elderly women in the age group of 60 years and above residing in ashrams of Vrindavan. Further the study attempts to examine that how the lives and status of the elderly women affected by the social and economic dimensions of social exclusion. The results of the study revealed that the elderly women were unhappy and very much disheartened by the behavior of their children but somehow coping-up with their life. Consequently the elderly women are excluded from the social and economic dimension of social exclusion.

Key Words: *Social Exclusion, Elderly, Women and Copping-Up Strategies.*

Introduction

The rise of ageing population in India at an unprecedented speed and scale has contributed to the multiple challenges for the elderly, particularly the elderly women. The weakening of familial ties and gradually decline of joint families in the recent decades has significantly contributed to the undermining position and status of the elderly (Nair 2014). Along with this numerous other changes like, migration of young generation, increased individualism, changing social values, etc, has reduced elderly in general and elderly women in particular to socially excluded position in the society.

India has a population of approximately 60 million elderly women who are in the age group of 60 years and above (Age Well Research & Advocacy Centre 2011). It was reported by the United Nation Population Fund and Help Age India that there are greater number of elderly women in comparison to elderly men and nearly three out of five single elder women are very poor (*The Hindu* 2012). It is also evident that among the living old age population in India, women outnumber man, thus they are more vulnerable to attacks of ageing. Such being the case, women with no husbands face additional problems and sufferings (Bharti 2011). Ageing itself has major socio-economic implications but when ageing is combined with gender another important dimension is added. Elderly women face not only age discrimination but also gender discrimination in later years of their life (Age Well Research & Advocacy Centre 2015) that deprives them from availing benefits of development and exclude them from the mainstream.

Meaning of social Exclusion

Social exclusion is a "socio-psychological fact" which is widespread in each and every society in different forms (Kumar 2013, 64). It is a complex concept that brings ahead the vulnerability of individual and collectivity in society (Masa Filipovic et al 2013). This term is actually used to assign the process that refuses the full or limited consideration of an individual or a group in society. It has been described as a dynamic concept by which certain collectivity, group or individual prevent access to, social, economic, political or cultural elements of "everyday life" (Walker and Walker 1997, 8: sohini, 1). However, this leads to a declining of social ties or total failure of social bonding between the individual and society. In Indian societies social exclusion remain an important subject since antiquity. The issues of social exclusion in India has been mainly associated more with caste, children and women but for elderly (especially elderly women) it is unrecognized and insignificantly acknowledge.

Objectives of the Study

There are following objectives of this study

- To study the socio-economic background of the elderly women.
- To examine that how the lives and status of the elderly women affected by the social and economic dimensions of social exclusion.
- To find out the coping up strategies by the elderly women.

Material and Methods

The study incorporate qualitative research method to examine the problems or issues related to social exclusion of the elderly women. The study material consists of number of case studies conducted with the representation of elderly women, to capture their affairs of real life. The case studies have been analyzed on the basis of responses given by the elderly during the field survey. Further these narratives have been used as a technique to tab the subjective understanding of the respondents. For the

present study eight cases of sample aged 60 years and above were purposively selected from the ashrams of Vrindavan town in Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh.

Cases Presentations: On the basis of information provided by the respondents the following case studies, have been prepared

Case 1.

Kasturi Ahirwar (name changed) was 62 years old lady, a resident of Jhansi district, living in an ashram for the last one year. She narrated her life history and said:

My husband was a carpenter and I was a housewife. I had three son and one daughter, all son's were married and settled and living separately with their own family. When my children were young I stayed in my own house built by my husband. In my earlier days I was very happy with my children, husband and my mother-in-law. Me and my husband work very hard to up-bring my children and provided them good education. Two of my elder son was in railway job and younger son had his own furniture business. At the age of 56 years my husband gets lost and never returns to home yet. I complained in the police and try to find him but I did not get any clue of my husband. After this incident my daughter also get married and settled. Since then I am very depressed and isolated. My three sons and their wives have started fighting for the property and house which is owned by me. They always argue me and say that "you are old enough to control the finance; you must leave all this calculation and be free from all the liabilities and we all are here to manage the home affairs and care for you". One fine day I distribute the property and house among my three sons. That is the biggest mistake, that I believe on my married sons and gave them all of my money and wealth earn by my husband. Now being completely dependent and unable to work household chores I had to face domestic violence and verbal abuse from my children. Two of my elder daughter-law always use to quarrel with me on petty things and also denied to provide me cooked food from their kitchen. Whole day they use to shout on. I get too much frustrated and feel like dying. Then once I met my cousin in far relation who get widow long back years and shared my situation. She suggests me to leave the home and come to the ashram in vrindavan. Since then I am here in this ashram and to cope-up with this old age I keep myself busy in religious activities such as singing songs, preparing food in the temple, etc. Many times I feel very lonely and stressed due to the kind of behavior and relation my children kept with me. Some time I recall my children and feel very shame on their behavior.

The above case shows that how the elderly women misbehaved and ill- treated in her own family on the issue of money and property. The house and property which belongs to this elder lady was also snatched away by her sons and their wives, left her alone in a deteriorating, isolated and economically excluded position.

Case 2.

Another lady Shia Rani (name changed) was a 69 year old widow, a resident of Mathura District. She recalled her life events and stated:

My husband was a bank manager and I studied up-to fifth class. I had a family of six members consisting of my husband, my four children and myself. Two of my daughters were married and settled in foreign. Younger daughter and son married and settled in India. When my husband got retired he divided his property into two equal halves, one for son and one for me and himself. We had some land in Mathura, but soon after the death of my husband, somehow my son sold all the land without informing me. After few days he also took out eight to ten lakhs money from the joint account and buys a truck for himself. Once when I visit the bank alone in case of taking money of my husband pension and also to transfer few money in my younger daughter account I came to know about the fraud my son has done with me. I felt very shocked and then I informed my younger daughter and asked her to help but when she tried to intervene, my son started shouting and quarrelling with us. Apart from this he also compelled me to transfer the remaining money and property to his name but I did not listen to him and refuse to give him anything else. After this he started frequent quarrels and abuse against me. One evening he hit me hard, pushes me in the corner of the house and told me to sign the property papers or he will kill me. Finally, I get scared and sign the papers but then I have nothing in my hands except the verbal abuse of my son. When I inform my younger daughter and tell her to take me away with her. After two days she came and takes me to her house where she was staying with her husband. I started living with her but after few days my son-in-law also refuse to keep me in his house. He told me that I cannot keep you without any payment, either you go away from here or you pay some monthly amount to me. Now I am no more burdens on any one, living in this ashram and working as a gardener. This much is enough to keep going on in this old age. I feel very bad when I recall the doings of my son and son-in-law. Now a day's children are very disobedient and self-centered. They had their own way of life and had no feeling for the old parents. Even my daughters did not come to ask me about any problems and woes.

This case reveals that how the elderly widow women easily become the victims of economic exclusion by her son. Being elder, widow and women she was easily targeted for the exclusion. When she was economically weak, her daughter and son-

in-law also refuse to help her. Even she was physically abused and forced to leave all her savings, hence she was economically excluded.

Case 3.

An old lady in her seventies named Kali Devi staying in Virdavan ashram narrated:

I am a 72 years old widow. I have two sons and no daughter. My husband was a school teacher but died in an accident at a very early age. Since then I am receiving a widow pension. I am also an educated lady and studied till graduation so after the death of my husband I worked as a home tutor, as well as a tailor to bring up my two sons. Today both of my sons are economically well-off and their families were settled in Lucknow. Elder is working in secretariat and other son is an audit officer but they did not like to keep me with them because they think that I have many bad habits such as speaking loudly, interfering in between, etc, and I cannot adjust with their respective families. When I stay with them, both of my daughter-in law use to quarrel with me for the pension I get. They also denied my little grand children to chat or come nearby me. Every alternating day they use to say “*khane ke liye yaha chadi rehti hai aur pension jane khaha le jati hai, free ka khane ko chahiye, na kuch karna na dena*”. One fine morning at 8’0 clock my daughter-in-law straight away told me that either you gave your entire savings to us or you go away from here. We cannot look after you, we have our own burden. I agree upon this and keep the papers of economic saving on her hand. Then after few days they again started abusing me just for nothing then I decided to join this ashram and ended the whole story. Now neither they bother about me nor I feel like meeting them, only the things hearts me is that my own blood (son) becomes selfish and forget all what I did for them.

From this case study it is clear that how the elderly women is excluded not only from the economic dimension of social exclusion but also from the social dimension. Again in this case the respondent is pressurized by her daughter-in-laws to give up all her saving and monthly pension in their hands.

Case 4.

Another respondent named shakuntla Bharaduj (name changes) was a 62 years old lady living in the ashram with her husband recalls her historical events and stated:

Once we were a rich married couple. We had our business and had a lot of wealth and money but had no child. Few years later we adopted my husband cousin brother’s daughter as my child. We gave lot of love and care for her, fulfill all her requirement as our daughter. She has done engineering and now working in a multinational company. Few years back we get her married with the person who was selected by her and they both were staying with us in our house as her husband was also having a job in Delhi, where we were staying. Sometimes he helps my husband in his business. Gradually he convinced us and we hand over our business to him and also did some property in his name. But he had an eye on our whole business and property. Once he made a plan with my her wife (my adopted daughter) and kidnapped me and my husband in our own house but kept us in a separate room where we stay in darkness for one and a half months just because they wanted my husband to transfer all of our business, house, property, etc in their name. Finally me and my husband signed all the property related papers and leave our house for ever and shifted here in this ashram. She further mentioned that now we have no economic and social support to file a court case against them. We are happy here by living in this religious environment and doing a petty work of making envelopes and pickles.

Again the case illustrates an economic exclusion of elderly husband and wife. In present scenario the young once are so money minded that they always proceed in life by keeping some economic profit in mind. They have nothing to do with emotion and values of their parents. In this case the children act like an enemy for the money and economically exclude their own elder parents.

Case 5.

Jaishri (name changed) was the 66 years old lady expressed her pain and reported that:

My husband was an engineer in irrigation department. I have only one sons and his wife is also working. My son works in central government and daughter-in-law is a teacher in inter primary school. When my husband was alive I stayed with him and enjoyed my life. But since my husband died I am completely depressed and isolated. Then I had gone to Gazipur to live with my son family. My daughter-in law is from metro city so she had a very different life style. Almost every day they use to do their dinner in a restaurant or a hotel and come late night. I keep on waiting for them and complete many of the household tasks. One day when I asked my son to come early in night my but my daughter-in-law started shouting on me. She argues that we are not a little kid, just because of you every day we use to get late. ‘I don’t like to see your face, keep on sitting all time, doing nothing. I lost my privacy in my own house. You are not our responsibility, you have your own money then why can’t you have your dinner or breakfast somewhere else’. With her my sons also started neglecting me and never asked for my needs or health problems from me. I feel very upset due to the kind of emotional and mental mistreatment my



son use to give me. Day by day the problems were increasing and the relationships are becoming brittle. Then I thought of that what the use of keeping such relationship is, left my son home and come to this ashram. Here I am working as a group leader to look after the Kitchen work.

The case reflects that the mental torture and inhumane treatment experienced by the elderly women. She was misbehaved by her own son and daughter-in-law that lead to increased brittleness in interpersonal relationships and loss of familial ties with each other. However, all this has placed the elderly women to an isolated and socially excluded position.

Case 6.

There was another respondent named Sarita verma (name changed) who was 62 years old, staying in ashram since two years reported about her earlier days:

My husband worked as a manual labour and I work as a maid servant. I had one sons and daughter. My elder sister son also use to stay with me because my sister died of cancer when her son was of six months. Then I take the responsibility of my sister son and brought him up as my own child. My daughter was the eldest of all my three children so I get her married and make her settled. After three years of my daughter marriage my husband was working on a site and he died due to falling from high unfinished building. Unfortunately after some time my real son also get sick and he died of brain stroke. Now I am all alone and living with my sister son. He uses to give me lot of care and respect before his marriage. As soon as he gets married he stops listing me. His wife is very cunning; always keep on blaming me for her wrong doings. I think that now I had no one of my own accept sister son, with whom I can live rest of my life. Due to this reason I keep on listening to my daughter-in-law. After some time I complained my sister son about her wife but he showed me down and take her side. Further they also restrict me to the four walls of the house and ordered me to do all the cooking, cleaning and dusting. They keep me busy inside the house and did not allow me to interact with any of the neighbors or the guest. If I ask them to attend any of the festival events in our society or to go in any function they refuse me by saying that “you are too old to enjoy all this, now it’s not your age to go here and there. Remain at home and do your pooja”. I am fed-up from my life of prisoner and one day I came out of the house without informing them. Since then I am staying in ashram and able enough to sustain my life. I make toys of mud and sale them near by the temple and do not keep any expectations from them.

The above narrative illustrates the social exclusion of the elderly women. In this case the children are not misbehaving or physically abusing the elderly women but excluding her from social rights by denying to live according to her wishes and restricting her social mobility.

Case 7.

Janki Bai (name changed) was a 72 years old woman mentioned about her condition and remarked that:

I have three sons and two daughters. All are married and settled. My husband was a station master in Railway. We both worked very hard to educate our children. Two of my sons are well placed in multinational company and the third son was a junior engineer in railway. My daughter is also working in private sector. All of them are married and staying with their respective families and I was also staying far off from my children with my husband. But my husband had a habit of chewing tobacco due to which his kidney got ruined and he died at an age of 61 years. Since then all my three children decided to keep me and take care of me on turn basis. My second elder son takes me with him to his house. He had arranged a separate room for me. Due to my husband death I was much stressed and day by day my health condition was becoming very. Many times I reported my son and daughter-in-law about my health and gastric problem but they just ignore. Once I got bedridden then my son take me to doctor. Doctor told that I am suffering from tuberculosis. As my son came to know about this he shifted my accommodation in the second floor of his house where no one was staying. My daughter-in-law has ordered her maid to just serve meals to me and not to listen anything else. She restricts me to stay in a single room and to assimilate with the grand children. The other son lives in nearby house but refuses to take care of me. I require regular medicines and health checkups but no one bothers. My daughter also avoided me. One day on Shivratri my son take me for pooja along with his family and left me here in this temple. Whole day I keep on waiting for them but no one came to take me back. Since then I am here in this ashram taking treatment of tuberculosis from the government hospital. I have an ill health so I unable to work much but I sit with my friends and make some garlands for the temple.

In above case the family had a resource, separate living arrangement for the elderly women but they never treated her as the member of their family. Therefore the social exclusion in this case comprised of keeping the elder women in isolation, denial of adequate medical treatment and also ignoring for proper care and respect.

Case 8.

Parvati Devi (name changed) was a 63 years old lady narrated her life events and said:

I had a family of four members, me and my husband and my two sons. My husband works as a mechanic in a private company. My husband worked very hard to provide good education for our children. My husband takes out his entire provident fund for our son education. My elder son had done M. B. A. but he fell in love with a rich girl and wanted to marry her. I and my husband were against to this marriage because that girl's father wanted my son to stay in their home after marriage. My son did not listen to us and leave away. We have a faith on our younger son who was doing job in a bank but he also ditched us. Once my husband him the papers of house allotment and asked him to do the registry of the house on my name but he cheat us and get the registry done on his wife name. As the days passed on they started mistreating us. My son started frequent conflicts with my husband such as they restrict us to watch T.V. in the drawing, reduced our diet (saying that to eat less is good for your health), forcing me to do all the cleaning and kitchen work and so on. Finally my husband told them to leave our house but that was the day when my younger son told about the house registry and asked from us to leave the house.

By knowing about this fraud my husband get shocked and he got heart attack due to which one of his leg get paralyzed. Then I came to this ashram with my husband. I take care of my husband and packed prashad to sale in the shops. She further replied:

Though it's very difficult to stay alive in such a situation when our children, betrays, it leads to a very painful condition. We have devoted our whole pleasure of life in bringing up our sons but they have no feeling of gratitude for us.

This is the case where elder women and her husband were excluded from social and economic dimension of social exclusion. Despite the old age both husband and wife were compelled to do some work. They were denied of sufficient food and essential needs. In their old age when they require helping hand of their children, they were disobeyed and disrespect and financially cheated by them. Both the children did not even command a respect for the hard work and struggle their parents did for them.

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of the case studies provides the glimpse of social exclusion experienced by the elderly women in Indian families. All the cases selected for the study propounds that the elderly women were excluded from the social and economic dimension of social exclusion. They were tortured, insulted, humiliated and also denied of access to social rights. In most of the cases the elderly women were bounded to step out of house and engage in other activities of entertainment and leisure. It is more noticeable in the case of those who are widow and dependent on their children for economic support. Moreover they were restrained to regulate and manage their own money and assets, even they were forced to give-up their pension in exchange of taking cooked food and other things from their own children. Instead of all these painful incidences the elderly women were sustaining their livelihood, keeping positive attitude by neglecting all the wrong doings of their children as a matter of their destiny.

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