

Socio Economic Condition of Rural Women

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Introduction-India is a country which attained independence in 15 August, 1947, but the rural-urban divide, gender based divide and the rich-poor divide are still plaguing in the country. According to 2011 census, the populations of rural women who are literate are 58.8 percent. Contemporary Indian culture reflects a strong connection to its ancient history. India's past provides insights to the current status of Indian women in society. Archaeological, sculptural and artistic findings revealed the nature of Indian women's lives in ancient India. The Vedic culture believed that men and women were created as equals. Status is a condition applicable to a point of time. It refers to what a person is, whereas the closely linked notion of role refers to the behaviour expected to people in a status.¹

India is not an exception to this and year after year the quantum of allotment for the education portfolio has increased both in the union and state Government budgets. As a result, there is a veritable explosion in the innovative fields of education. This is also seen in the entry of foreign universities into the higher education scenario. As a corollary to all this, the enrolment of women students in educational institutions is on an increasing trend. This is due to many factors like more concessions and scholarships offered by Government. The education imparted to women contributes great benefits to society. It not only improves the status of women, but also has a positive effect on the nation's development.²

The term socio-economic status denotes the relative position of a person on a publicly recognized scale or hierarchy of social worth. It is the honour or prestige attached to one's position in society. It also refers to the financial position of a person. Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to

credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face, which are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide³

Status of Women in the World

Women constitute not only half the world population but also sway the growth of the remaining half. They produce half the world's food supply and account for 60 percent of the working force but comprise only about 30 percent of the official labour force, receive benefits of only 10 percent of the world's economy and surprisingly own less than 01 percent of the world's real estate. They have little access to productive resources and negligible control over family income. In India, while they produce 50 percent of the food consumed by the country, they earn only 10 percent of the income and own 10 percent of the property or wealth of the country. A common perception about women in India is that their status has always been low compared with women in advanced or developed countries. *Table-1* shows that the comparison of gender related development index and it's component among various country.

Table-1: Comparison of Gender Related Development Index and it's Component

Sl. No.	Name of Country	Gender Related Development	As per % of HDI	GDP (in US \$)
1.	Austria	0.966	98.9	34923
2.	Norway	0.961	99.6	53433
3.	Iceland	0.959	99.0	44613
4.	Canada	0.959	99.2	35812
5.	Sweden	0.956	99.3	36712
6.	France	0.956	99.4	33674
7.	Netherland	0.954	98.9	38694
8.	Finland	0.954	99.5	34526
9.	Spain	0.949	99.4	31560
10.	Ireland	0.948	98.2	44613
11.	India	0.594	97.1	4102

Source: Human Development Report, 2012.

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The previous United National Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated “As women receive greater education and training, they will earn more money. As women earn more money, as has been repeatedly shown – they spend it in further education and health of their children, as opposed to men, who often spend it on drink, tobacco or other women. As women rise in economic stature, they will gain greater social standing in the household and the village and will have greater voice. As women’s economic power grows, it will be easier to overcome the tradition of ‘son preference’ and thus put an end to the evil of dowry.”⁴

As more and more women have joined the workforce, the social and economic landscapes of developed countries have been transformed. Although many women struggle to balance paid employment and unpaid family demands, the feminization of labour markets has improved women’s income and strengthened autonomy and empowerment. Education has contributed to this transformation by opening up new employment opportunities. Gender imbalances in education are transmitted directly to job markets. Women’s pay and their employment conditions are influenced not just by the supply of labour and demand for skills, but also by social barriers, cultural practices and discrimination.

Social Status of Women in India

India is a country of contradictions. On the one hand, women are worshipped as deities, without whose blessings, work cannot be initiated. On the other hand, crimes against women and girls are increasing day by day in India. It is sad that in many cases, the perpetrators are known to the victims. The perpetrators could be among relatives, neighbours, friends etc. This increasing mistrust can create havoc in the Indian societal pattern. The patriarchal norms are so entrenched in the Indian society that it is very difficult to pull oneself out of this conundrum. The discrimination is the result of the gender bias which forms an inherent part of global society. Some of the visible and reported gender bias malpractices prevalent in Indian societies are female foetus termination, killing the girl child at birth, less neutrino, medical care, education and freedom due to preference for the male child, marriage before puberty, dowry death etc.

The status of women in our country has been undergoing drastic changes from era to era. It has degenerated from that of a deity to *devadasi*, from the pious to the impious and from virtue to vice. It has been rightly said that the status and position of women in society is the

best way to understand a civilization, its progress and its shortcomings.⁵ Great strides have been made in ensuring equality for women in Indian society. However, contradictions and gaps in protecting certain basic rights of women continue to exist. Many regional variation, religious, caste and class based differences have a definitive impact on women in India. Crucial in transforming the social status of women are protective and preventive legislations seeking to better the status of women.

The early reforms sought to tackle different social practices such as child marriage, sati and remarriage of widows through legislation. The attempt to bring about social transformation through legislation is still being pursued with mixed results. Noteworthy amongst these are- (a) the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act - 1971, (b) the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, (c) the Maternity Benefit Act – 1961, (d) the Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act-1986, (e) the Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act 1986, (f) the Commission of Sati Act 1987, (g) the prenatal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of misuse) Act 2002, and (h) the protection of women from Domestic Violence Act- 2005.

Economic Status of Women in India

The economic status of women in the country has undergone many changes. The liberalization and globalization phase has had a serious impact on women workers. While new work arenas such as information technology and biotechnology have absorbed more and more women, there has also been a marked increase in the presence of women in the unorganised and informal sector. Nearly 93 percent of women workers in India are in unorganised and informal employment and their numbers are steadily rising. Globalization and the removal of trade restrictions have impacted domestic industry and small farmers. This in turn has adversely impacted low paid women workers. The feminization of poverty is a growing concern as the number of female inter-state migrant workers within the country is rapidly growing.⁶

Over the past 15 years, women’s paid employment has increased throughout the world. In India, the reasons for this increase include market liberalization causing lower wages and a greater need in household for more than one wage earner, lower birth rates, urbanization and greater education among women. New field in our country, gender inequalities that are well established in other sectors of the labour force are already being replicated in the IT sector. Labour force participation provides

one measure of the employment status of females. While participation rates have been increasing, large gaps persist for adolescents and young adults. Surveys for 2006 indicate that 64% of women aged 20 to 24 in South Asia are not in full time education or work, compared with 5 % of men. The female labour force participation has been increasing only marginally and remains well below male levels. Barriers to women's participation in labour markets and to gender equity vary by country.⁷

Now a day, the number of women employees has increased. So, women's contribution towards the income of the family and nations has also increased. Actually, there is no exact measurement for women's contribution in economic activity. The majority of the women employees are in the informal sector. As every family has to face various challenges like inflation and deflation, women have to go to any work to meet the economic problems of the family. In addition to that some of the women go to work to increase their standard of living and also to improve their social status. Now a day, women go to work in order to earn supplemental incomes. It leads to increase in income-generating employment and empowerment of women and removes the bias against women. There is an urge for the equal participation of women along with men in the social, economic and political processes of national development.

Conclusion-In the light of above discussion it can be said that socio-economic status of rural women are changing era to era. There has been a steady transformation in the status of the women in comparison to earlier periods. It has been rightly said that the status and position of women in society is the best way to understand a civilization, its progress and its shortcomings. Status of Indian women began to change radically during the modern period. In villages there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the four walls of the household and becoming workers. Employment has given rural women economic independence and the feeling of importance. They now feel that they can stand on their own and look after the entire family by themselves. This has boosted their self-pride and self confidence.

India is a traditionally patriarchal and male-dominated society. Therefore, without the positive and liberal mindset the average Indian male to encourage the working women, a real elevation of the working women's status in society will remain a distant dream. The government has actively both through law and policy sought to improve the status of women. But, India has a lower share of women's contribution to the

GDP than the global average of 37 percent. India could boost its growth by 1.5 percent points to 9 percent per year it around 50 % of women could join the work force. However, ending crimes against women is still a challenge. It could be necessary to prevent ills by ensuring women autonomy, also increased participation and decision making power in the family and public life both.

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