

Economic Empowerment: The Changing Approach Of Economic Role Of Women In India

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ABSTRACT : *In the past , women's economic role was unrecognized and their contributions had not given economic value. Due to an assertive government policies and gender empowerment measures , women's economic activities have become more and more visible and women are now accepted as contributors to economic growth. In this context, the present paper aims to examine the approach of the government of India towards women empowerment in various plan periods and in the vision of fifteen years of future development.*

KEY WORDS : *Empowerment, Economic role, Economic activities, Economic value*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is a conscious process of gaining control over resources , raise their levels of participation in decision making and enhance their financial capabilities. Empowered women can take control and ownership of choices. Economic empowerment is an antecedent to women's all round development by minimising their vulnerability especially womenization of poverty. A few decades ago , women's function as home maker and labour are indirect contributions to family income. At present women's participation in economic activities directly contributing to national output. In this backdrop, the present paper focuses on changing approach of economic role of women in past and present in the light of economic empowerment.

II. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to examine the perspective of economic role of women in past and present and analyse the economic empowerment of women. More elaborately the objectives of the present study are as follows.

- 1) To examine the historical perspective of economic role of women and to study the factors which hindered their economic activities.
- 2) To analyze the significance of women role in development planning.
- 3) To study the National Employment Policy in India for better understanding of the government's approach towards women employment.
- 4) To examine the present economic role of women by analysing their workforce participation in India.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was based on the data obtained from secondary sources viz. government reports , journals , books etc.

IV. ECONOMIC ROLE OF WOMEN -A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Before the inception of Five Year Planning in India, economic status of women was very low. Women's functions as home maker and her labour are indirect contributions to family income. However her economic independence on man has reduced her to the position of a slave. The majority of Indian women were 'instruments of labour' who had to seek work to feed their families. Based on the Sub Committee Report (1939-47;225-31) on women's role in planned economy, majority of Indian women were labour. They worked on land, in cottage industries and factories as forced labour. At that time the working class women had so many problems. In addition, they had difficulty reconciling economic activity with their domestic roles. At work they faced endless problems gender bias ruled their work lives in every sector. Wage differentials existed obviously because of the low status given to women's place in the economic life of the nation. As illiterate, unskilled unorganized abundant labour, women were paid low wages. Women were not allowed to enter into all sectors. Especially in public services. The economic activities of women were ignored so that there was wage discrimination among men and women.

Women's right to work was affected not only by low work opportunities but by social attitudes in all classes. Baldly put, gender bias, assumptions of woman's place in society and failure to assess women's economic value resulted in a range of effects. Middle class women could not enter all spheres of economic activity. Working class women suffered the prejudices of employers particularly married and non-recognition of the value of their work denied them fair and equal wages. The theory that made their conditions worsened is, women's labour is not equal to men's labour. Because they thought that men are stronger than women. So that they could be given low wages. They believed that women's work was a supplementary. There were no dependents on her because men only the food providers. And women's work was not recognized particularly in agriculture, even in the household management. It was clear that

- Women of all classes have to work out economic necessity
- Social attitudes at all levels (the state, employers, family members) operate against women of different classes in different ways.
- Women's labour was not valued at all or sufficiently, inside or outside at the home.
- As a consequence, the work women do is not socially valued and therefore neither recognized nor remunerated.
- Working women have great difficulty in balancing work outside with house work.
- There is a dire need for state action to help women in all these respects in order to further gender equality and bring justice to women.

V. WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN INDIA

The importance of economic role of women in development had been recognized by the government of India right from the very First Plan 1951-56. However, women in these earlier plans were treated as subjects of welfare and women's role in the economy had been neglected. In 1971, the government of India appointed a committee on the status of women in India in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country. As a result, the VI Plan 1980-85 adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment. In the subsequent plans the thrust on generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper vocational education and vocational training continued. The Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2002 adopted the National Policy for empowerment of women which laid down definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions along with well defined 'Gender Development Index' to monitor the impact of its implementation in raising the status from time to time. An integrated approach adopted in the Ninth Plan works towards empowering women through convergence of existing services, infrastructure and man power available in both women specific and women related sectors with the ultimate objective of achieving the set goal.

During the Tenth Plan 2002-07, the National Policy on Empowerment of Women was adopted which includes the following strategies. (a) create an enabling environment for women to exercise their Rights both within and outside their homes ; (b) to reserve one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies ,(c) to adopt a special strategy for the Women Component Plan to ensure that at least 30% of funds and benefits flow to women from all development sectors (d) to organize women into Self Help Groups as a mark of the beginning of empowering them (e) to accord high priority and ensure easy access to material and child health services (f) to initiate steps for eliminating gender bias in all educational programmes; and to institute plans for free education of girls upto college levels including professional levels (g) to equip women with necessary skills in modern upcoming trades which would make them economically independent and self-reliant in modern upcoming trades which would make them economically independent and self-reliant (h) to increase women's access to credit through setting up of Development Bank for women entrepreneurs in the small and tiny sectors.

In the Eleventh Plan 2007-12 , for the first time, women are recognised not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that interventions in favour of women must be multi-pronged and they must; (a) provide women with basic entitlements (b) address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment (c) ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women (d) ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in Parliament and State Assemblies and (e) strengthen existing institutional mechanism and create new ones for gender main-streaming and effective policy implementation.

In the Twelfth Plan 2012-2017, priority was given to ensure improving the position and condition of women by addressing structural and institutional barriers as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming by a) greater freedom and choice for women by generating awareness and creating institutional mechanisms to help women question against patriarchal beliefs that are determined to their empowerment b) improving health and education indicators for women like maternal mortality, infant mortality, nutrition levels, enrolment and retention in primary, secondary and higher education c) reducing the incident of violence against women and providing quality care services to the victims d) improving employability of women, work participation rates especially in the organised sector and increased ownership of assets and control over resources e) increasing women's access to public services and programmes through establishing and strengthening convergence mechanisms at multiple levels, creation of physical infrastructure for women and improving the capacity of women's organizations.

Neeti ayog, the vision of 15 years document 2017 which replaces the 5 year plans in India, aims to recognize powerful women of India's workforce. It implies not only empowering female entrepreneurship and business owners, but also recognizing women's unpaid care, domestic work and the overwhelming majority of women in the informal economy.

VI. WOMEN AND THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY IN INDIA

In the National Employment Policy gender sensitive employment policies are taken into account that special circumstances and problems of women therefore enunciated from time to time. It aims at shifting women from invisible work from low productive employment, especially in agriculture to high productive employment and from low wage and no security to higher wage with social security work conditions. Complimentary policies are also adopted as special measures to access and such other facilities for women entrepreneurs and home based workers which help to promote self employment for women.

Promotions and innovations of gender sensitive technology was undertaken in aiding women workers and enhancing their participation in industries. Women as a percentage of workforce in SEZ (Special Economic Zone) is very high and their participation in unorganised sectors within EPZs (Export Processing Zone) almost double that unorganised work. Sectors where women's participation insignificant were identified for specific focus as for example, in agriculture, food processing fishing, plantations, forestry, horticulture, export intensive manufacturing tourism and care services with a view to introduce technology that are drudgery reducing and or labour augmenting there by creating conditions for employment generation, a decent work and higher productivity.

Policies and programs for skill training and development for women have a specific component of entrepreneurship development for women-headed micro and small enterprises. Special institutional mechanisms created to cater to women's employment such as information centres and

organizational structures to promote decent employment in emerging sectors and activities. Special facilities are established in clusters and large enterprises to ensure that basic conditions of work with dignity are provided for women workers and that no discriminatory practices are allowed. These relate to (a) sanitary, drinking water, eating and child care facilities (b) ensure the payment of minimum wages wherever applicable (c) enforcement of safety standards (d) representation of women in collective bodies of workers.

The Self Help Groups of women have emerged as an innovative form of organization for accessing credit, marketing as well as other services. While encouraging the spread of this organizational form to areas where it is currently either absent or low presence, policies will be put in place to ensure that micro credit graduates from consumption smoothing to livelihood credit that will have a focus on the creation of self employment with backward-forward linkages. Specific area in which women have responded in large numbers arising out of economic compulsions is their high level of participation in the National Rural Employment Guaranteed Programme (NREGP). Special attention was given to the educational and skill training requirements of women workers thereby addressing, inter alia, the perceived bias against women workers in the labour market. Given the greater deficit in organization and representation of women workers, especially in the informal economy, special programmes and enabling conditions for organizing informal women workers and strengthening their collective capacity.

VII. ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA- THE PRESENT SCENARIO

As per Census 2011, the female workforce participation rate based on sector wise, wage or salary wise and age-wise are given below. The statistics reveals the gender disparity in the workforce participation.

- The workforce participation rate for females is 25.51% against 53.26% for males
- Rural sector has a better female workforce participation rate of 30.02% compared with 53.03% for males
- whereas for urban sector the participation rate for females trails at 15.44% against 53.76% for males.
- 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural labourers, 24.0% are cultivators, 5.7% are household Workers Population Ratio.
- National Sample Survey (68th Round) results indicate that the worker population ratio for females in rural sector was 24.8% and 54.3% for males. In Urban sector, the ratio is 14.7% for females and 54.6% for males.
- Among the States/UTs, highest worker population ratio for females in the rural sector was in Himachal Pradesh at 52.4% and in the urban sector in Sikkim at 27.3%

- In the assessment, it emerged that 59.3% females of the rural workforce were self-employed , 5.6% had regular wage/salaried employment and 35.1% females were casual labours as compared with 54.5%, 10.0% and 35.5% males in the same categories respectively.
- Urban India had equal proportion i.e 42.8% of women participation in self-employed and regular women and men in India.
- A total of 20.5% women were employed in the organised sector with 18.1% working in the public sector and 24.3% in the private.
- The labour force participation rate for women cross all age groups was 25.3% in rural sector and 15.5 in urban sector compared with 55.3% and 56.3% for men in the rural and urban sectors respectively.
- The unemployment rate for women in rural area was 2.9% against 2.1 for men whereas it was 6.6 % and 3.2% for women and men in urban areas.
- The average wage/salary received by regular wage/salaried employees of economically active age group was Rs.428.66 per day for females compared with Rs.550.23 per day for males in rural areas. For urban areas it was Rs.609 and Rs.805 per day for females respectively.

VIII. CONCLUSION

No doubt , economic development has formidable influence on the women's work participation rates in recent time . The increased access to goods and services offers women employment opportunities and public services in education, health , nutrition etc. The educational expansion has greatly improved women's skills to take up specialized jobs and ability to use improved technology efficiently. Improvements in techniques of production have contributed greatly in enhancing productivity and incomes of women. Urbanization has weakened the influence of joint families of social norms affecting women's role perpetuated by the system. The higher cost of living cities offered strong motivation for increased female work anticipation to supplement family income. The emphasis on income and profits tended to overcome inhibition and discrimination against women entering into labour market. The access and extension and credit facilities helped women to improve techniques for obtaining higher production and incomes. Women's economic empowerment through workforce participation is highly connected with poverty reduction. When women achieve their full economic potential, families and countries will reach the path of economic growth. The United Nations Millenium Goals have explicitly linked economic progress to the equalization of opportunities for women. These goals thus recongize the importance not only raising the status of women, but also of narrowing disparities between men and women . To conclude, though female work participation increased , it is not same as men's participation. Still there exists vast gender gap in the workforce participation rates in India. When women reach 100% of education and improved

technical skills , then only they can enter into any market for employment. By realising the fact, the government of India has been focusing in this direction.

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