

**STUDIES ON DISPARITIES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS  
AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY OF RURAL WOMEN**

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ISSN 2277-7733

Volume 10 Issue 4,

March 2022

**Abstract**

*Any type of development cannot help women until or unless their economic status and livelihood security have improved in urban as well as in rural settings. Many studies have pinpointed the issues relating to women, but not much attention have been paid to examine their economic status and livelihood security. A woman is said to be economically empowered when she gains power as a result of increased access to economic resources. The means of achieving economic empowerment are : access to micro finance, increase in income, ability to make decisions regarding the utilization of credit, etc. Economic establishment is the individual aspect of women development. The economic empowerment means greater access to financial resource inside and outside the households, reducing vulnerability of poor women to crisis situation like famine, flood, riots, death and accidents in the family and significant increase in income of rural women. Economic security gives rural women the power to retain income and use it at her discretion. Hence, the present study aims to explore to find out the major factors those promoting women's socio-economic development in true sense and simultaneously to find out the major social constraints those Indian women have to face to empower and develop themselves from the long time span. This study has focused on several indicators of women's socio-economic development. Though there are a large number of studies related to socio-economic development of women but major promoting and reducing factors those responsible for women's elevation in actual sense have not received much attention so far. Hence, this study assumes great importance.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Gender Disparity, Socio-Economic Development, Ashtapath, Social -Constraints, Livelihood Security, Discrimination, Patriarchy.

The International Centre for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries have prepared a comprehensive report called, "The Role of Women in Developing Countries", for the World Conference on Women held in 1985 at Nairobi. According to this report, the role of women in development is most intimately related to the objectives and goals of comprehensive socio-economic development, and is a strategic question for the planned development of all the societies. Any development strategy which neglects the need for enhancing the role of women cannot lead to comprehensive socio-economic development. There is a need to recognize woman as a valuable asset for overall process of development and not as a burden or cost or a mere humanitarian concession to a disadvantaged groups.

The present study has given attention on rural women to realise their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives. The crucial dimensions in this study are: education and economic access, political, social-cultural, personal and

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familial. Each dimension is very important because the real empowerment of rural women is possible only when a woman has increased access to economic resources, more strength and courage for entering into the power structure, more involvement through social-cultural relationships and participation, more self-motivation and confidence, and more say in the family matters. Thus it can be said that women development is a process that constitutes various things at various levels such as greater control over finance, which extends to their decision-making capability regarding household decision, employment, income, knowledge, information, technology skills, training, fertility, sexuality, political power and social equalities and freedom of movement (physical mobility) and their control over material and intangible resources such as property, information and time.

### **Women's Development in Context to India's Concern:**

For the first time, under the Sixth Five Year Plan due recognition was given to the role of women in economic development. Under the Sixth Plan the problems of women's integration in economic development were analyzed and the Sixth Plan document contained a separate chapter on "Women and Development". The document stated that the major thrust of the Sixth Plan in the field of welfare of women is their economic upliftment through greater opportunities for salaried, self and wage employment. For this purpose, it provided for appropriate technologies, services, legal and financial initiatives and policy measures. During the last two decades, various studies, working groups and task forces and national conferences have been organized to identify and articulate the real issues confronting women in their multiple roles.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

The status of rural women is intimately connected with their economic status, which in turn, depends upon rights, roles and opportunity for the participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. However, all development does not result in improving women's economic activities. Pattern of women's activities are affected by prevailing social ideology and are also linked with the stage of economic development. The improvement in the status of women always has a positive impact on economic development.

There is no denying the fact that in terms of all indicators of development like socio-economic and livelihood status, rural women have fared worse than men, across regions and strata of the population. There is a clear difference between male and female entitlement with respect to property and assets, work and employment, earnings, education, health status, decision making, empowerment, etc., and as such, in reality women lagged behind men in terms of every aspect of life like, socio-economic and livelihood pointers. It has been amply supported recently by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) study that wage rates are lower for women as compared to men both in rural and urban areas of developing countries.

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After the intensive analysis of women's status, it has been raised a question 'where woman do stand in India'. Some recently released reports which aptly reflect the current dynamics in the context of women empowerment. According to UN Report (2005): women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-third of its work hours, receive one-tenths of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property. The latest Human Development Report, released by UNDP on 14 March 2013, puts India at 132<sup>nd</sup> position out of 187 countries, even below Pakistan (ranked 123<sup>rd</sup>) in its Gender Inequality Index that measures the inequality in between males and females in terms of three key indicators i.e. labour market, reproductive health and empowerment. While in the World Economic Forum's latest Global Gender Gap Index for the year 2012, India has been ranked at 105<sup>th</sup> place among 135 countries; the index assesses the gap between men and women on the basis of economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health survival and political empowerment.

Rural women are often unable to access health and educational services, lack decision-making power, and face higher levels of violence. Due to the firm existence of patriarchal structure in India, in most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names and do not get a share of parental property. There is no recognition for their hard work, just because their work is not evaluated in terms of money. Rural Women are ignored in matters, which are of concern to them as well. As a result, today rural women are the worst sufferer in the society due to drudgery, ill health, illiteracy, deprivation and humiliation. Backwardness of women is a sign of poverty and rural women are the worst sufferers during the period of scarcity and calamity.

In order to examine these problems, certain parameters of women empowerment are to be identified. In the present study, the so-called "ASHTAPATH" to empowerment is considered as the parameters of women empowerment, which is stated below:

Ashtapath (Eight-Fold-Path) to Empowerment by Pratibha Pandey, 2017 in her Paper has thrown light on "Status of Dalit Women: Need for Empowerment"

1. Access to and control over private assets and resources: This means access and control over productive resources such as land, house and equipment including agricultural implants;
2. Access to public resources: The term public resources include the entire range of service and fundamental rights guaranteed by the state. This will encompass natural resources such as common land, forest, water and other social and economic rights such as education, health care, credit, which should be assured by the welfare state;
3. Control over their income and labour: This would include an opportunity to participate in productive work and more importantly to be able to decide how she would like to spend the income earned;
4. Control over their bodily-sexuality, reproduction and physical security: One of the most crucial aspects of gender subordination is women's lack of control over their bodies. This would include the decisions

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regarding the three important aspects: marriage, sexual relations and family planning; 5. Control over physical mobility: An important and less discussed parameter of women's status is women's control over their physical mobility. We need to assess if the women have the autonomy to move freely as individual and does she go alone or does she need an escort; 6. Access to and control over political sphere: The participation of women into political sphere including local self- government, trade unions, federations of urban and rural poor, caste and community associations is the most critical in recording poor relations between men and women in the public; 7. Access to and control over intangible resources-information, influence, sense of self - worth and self - esteem: Intangible resources such as information and knowledge, the skills, self – confidence, articulation though invisible are integral elements in getting access and entitlements to material resources and in asserting their rights; 8. Position in law and their access to legal structures and redressal: The Constitution of India guarantees right to equality to every citizen irrespective of sexes and simultaneously makes special provisions for women.

### **Main Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study are: 1. To find out the impact of major factors those promote livelihood security of rural women in socio-economic upliftment; 2. To examine all the crucial obstacles and to identify the hidden social constraints, those rural and urban women have been facing since prolong span; 3. To analyze the various constitutional provision, implementation of laws, amendment and enactment those have been made for women in Indian Constitution.

**Hypothesis:** The following hypothesis have been formulated to facilitate the study whose authenticity has to be tested on the basis of findings: 1. Higher the socio-economic development better will be the opportunities for Women's development and livelihood security; 2. Inadequate socio-economic growth is one of the main cause for disparities in women development. Indian orthodoxy, patriarchy and restricted mobility, have kept women in subordinate position; 3. Law is regarded as a harbinger of social development of women, but enforcement of constitutional and legislative provisions relating to women has been unprofitable in India. Social attitudes, institutions keep women isolated, unaware or unable to get enforced their legal rights.

**Review of the Related literature:** A literature review is an important stage in any research process. It has two components: the first is the review of theoretical literature and the second is the review of empirical studies. As far as the subject matter of women development is concerned, there are two important sets of theories.

### **Theoretical Literature Review**

Among the two sets of theories the first one deals with the origin, spread and institutionalization of women's exploitation, women's oppression and gender discrimination etc. In this group we have theories of patriarchy, Marx's and

Engel's theories of women's exploitation, radical feminist theories explaining women's exploitation and its steps. These theories are interdisciplinary in nature and draw heavily from sociology and economics. The second set of theories is called approaches to women's empowerment. There are five approaches to women's empowerment, they are: (1) Welfare approach and (2) equity approach (3) anti-poverty approach (4) efficiency approach (5) and the empowerment approach.

### **Empirical Research**

The present study has focused on selective basis on well written and documented empirical studies which are published in referred journals and periodicals and also which are published as independent monographs or as research volumes.

The World Bank's study of women in development, (1980), has pointed out that the occupational barriers like traditional occupational confinement, skill generation constraints, lack of industrial knowledge are the powerful barriers to women's entry into the industrial sector as entrepreneurs, which has resulted in the existence of gender disparity.

Frank (1999), has examined livelihood diversity in developing countries. He revealed that gender was an integral and inseparable part of rural livelihoods and men and women have different assets, access to resources and opportunities. Women rarely owned land, may have lower education, discriminating access and their access to productive resources as well as decision making tend to occur through the mediation of men.

Amarthya K. Sen (2000), in his study relating to gender inequality strongly argues in favour of a 'Women's Agency'. Women agency implies women as changing agents not only to solve their own problems but also to solve the problems of the household, to resolve the issues in what he calls a co-operative conflict within a household in particular and a society in general. The entitlement approach of Amarthya K. Sen being a part of his wider approach broadly known as human capability approach, emphasizes upon the need for significance of gender empowerment. He focuses on primary capabilities as a part of providing basic minimum needs to reduce absolute poverty but also expanding opportunities in all walks of life to eradicate gender disparities.

Siddhartha Sarkar (2006), *Women Struggle for Sustainability*, this book examines women's link to socioeconomic development and offers guidance on how informal activities can become important instruments for eliminating poverty, regenerating the environment, creating employment opportunities, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and progressive status of women.

Ester Boserup's (2007), *Pioneering work, Women's Role in Economic Development*, was only the beginning of the burgeoning literature on women's participation in the economic development. She opined that when development excluded women from participation. It denied its benefits to women and it functioned for less effectively.

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Heenatabassum (2013), *Gender and Society*, in her book she has defined various indicators of gender development. It is easier to discuss empowerment than to implement it. The more recent concept of gender analysis occurs within all bureaus and agencies to make gender equity have come to the forefront. Gender oppression is defined as oppression associated with the gender norms, relations and stratification of a given society.

Ghosh and Ghosh (2014), had analyzed the women participation in agriculture across diverse Indian states. He found that, women participation in agriculture was increased but discrimination of wages and in working status still triumphs for women labour.

Rao et al. (2016), examined the trends and pattern of women's employment in India using secondary data for the time period from Census 1981 to Census 2011. All states and union territories of India as population and seven states from high per capita income states and seven states from low per capita income states were selected as sample states for the study. Result indicated that high variation in percentage of female workers to total worker ratio across the states.

### **Framework of Research Methodology**

For the research work scientific method of study has been applied. The study could be given a shape only when it has been guided through a logical framework. Research Design has been created for the fulfillment of the objectives.

### **Research Design**

The present study is based on the secondary sources. The study would be qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. The present study would be the combination of exploratory cum descriptive. Secondary data has been collected from books, thesis, journals, related bulletins, articles, magazines, newspaper and other reports, Centre for monitoring Indian economy, planning and development documents, census and internet etc. Primary data will be collected through well prepared Interview-Schedule. Primary and secondary data have been used for the analysis. The data will be analyzed by using appropriate statistical method.

### **Relevance and Significance of the Study:**

Development of women is considered as an important responsibility of every government. Till recently very little attention has been given to empowerment issues or ways in which both empowerment and sustainability aims could be accommodated. Many studies have been made in the area of women's development and many interesting finding have been drawn. The various factors which would influence empowerment of women have also been studied. Despite plethora of studies, women are in the pathetic situation. Further this study has given attention on women to realize their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives.

The studies reviewed above are relating to macro level and they are dealing with the empowerment of women. The studies on Socio-Economic Development of

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Women are either at the international level or at the national level and the studies at the micro level are scanty. The available studies are related to women empowerment in general. They deal with development of women ignoring the disparities in Socio-Economic Development of Women. The studies reviewed relating to the Socio-Economic Development of Women are not only at macro level but also have a limited objectives. The studies concerning to the disparities in the Socio Economic Development of Women in are scanty in macro as well as micro level. Though there are a large number of studies related to women's development but major promoting and reducing factors those responsible for women's socio-economic development in actual sense have not received much attention so far. Hence, this study assumes great importance.

### **Findings and Suggestions**

This is to specify significantly that the Constitution of India grants equality to women in various fields of life. Yet a large number of women are either ill equipped or not in a position to propel themselves out of their traditionally unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions. Statistics also show that there is still a very high preference for a male child in states like UP, MP, Punjab and Hariyana etc. The male to female ratio is very high in these states. Domestic violence is also widespread and is also associated with dowry. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society. It is important to educate the rural women. They are exploited at various levels. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society. The patterns of resource mobilization by government also have significant effects on rural women that are usually not recognized. Rural women have not actively participated in their own emancipation due to their lack of economic independence and rampant illiteracy. There are quite a large number of issues which need to be addressed to streamline the existing women development programmes in India as well as initiating actual work at the ground level. To initiate measurable actions at ground level, education of women should be given top priority and female literacy programmes need to be enforced across the country. Further to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural women need to be trained and better equipped for taking informed decisions. The real change will be only visible when social attitudes and norms change. Here inclusive programmes involving the men are the need of the hour. This will be helpful for working out adjustments and sharing of gender based specific performance or tasks which are currently overburdening the women to no end. Unless we improve the ground level living standards of rural women in India, we might not be able to influence their empowerment in any other possible way. Various issues that need to be addressed for improving overall conditions of the rural women in India include making access to affordable cooking fuel for rural women, providing safe drinking water, sanitation, increasing decision making

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capacity among women, providing equal wages as that of men, ending their exploitation, improving the political participation of rural women, eradicating poverty among women, increasing the security of women who are engaged in agriculture as daily wage workers, providing affordable healthcare and nutrition and managing the risk of unwanted pregnancies, HIV infections and sexually transmitted diseases. There is reservation of seats in local bodies and municipalities and another law is being envisioned for reservation in parliament. But the sad part is that all these laws and amendments have become toothless as the fundamental problems lies in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against rural women. Women empowerment cannot take place unless women come together and decide to self-empower themselves. The struggle for gender justice will be slow, strenuous and protracted, as the change cannot be brought about easily. It has to be fought at emotional, cognitive and action levels.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it might be observed that India has enacted many constitutional and legislative provisions for empowerment of rural women. Many development schemes especially for rural women have also been launched for improving their fortune. Such measures have started giving positive outcomes relating to rural women's problems. But the position of women in our country still leaves much to be desired. Top priority should be given in our developmental plans for improving female literacy and creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet.

Major attributes that contribute to women empowerment are access to education, social equity, status, safety, liberty, improved health, political participation, financial stability and legal and political awareness. Despite these all the motivational factors women are still lag behind man in many social indicators like limited access to education, health, economic opportunities, restricted mobility, more worrisome to their vulnerability and experience violent. Indian religion, caste system and patriarchy have kept women in subordinate position. Economic empowerment is the individual aspect of women development. The economic empowerment means greater access to financial resource inside and outside the household, reducing vulnerability of poor women to crisis situation like famine, flood, riots, death and accidents in the family and significant increase in income of women. Financial self-reliance of women both in the household and in external environment leads to the empowerment of women in the other sphere. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives. Studies confirm that female literacy has a significant influence in improving social and economic status, eliminate discrimination, eradicate literacy and increase enrolment.

The impact of 73rd Amendment (1993), reserving one third seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institution has been fruitful, and the women Reservation Bill 2010, approved by the Upper House of Parliament is another major step. But in



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real practices effective participation of women in local governance is ambiguous. Elected women may be proxies for their husbands or male leaders of political parties. They may get hardly any opportunities to work due to their lack of political experience and traditional social barriers. Another important landmark in the history of women welfare in India is the enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992. These Acts revolutionized both the rural and urban local bodies, the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipal bodies. They provide for the reservation of 33.3 per cent of the political offices for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations.

Indian Constitution has made many legal laws, welfare policies and essential Amendment for women's development. Despite these efforts, women are still deprived of basic facilities, women do not enjoy the protection of labour laws, gender equality in agriculture is still a distant dream due to gender-blind policies and programmes. Self Help Groups, government, not government policies are not playing very satisfactory role as expected from them. Information and communication technologies can improve rural women's leadership and participation in community and economic development activities. Effective access and use of information and communication technologies can improve rural women's leadership and participation in community and economic development activities. However, rural women are at the lowest level of the digital gender divide.

Unless the process of development is properly engendered, it shall remain endangered. One concurrent example of gender discrimination is glass-ceiling effect. The term "glass ceiling" is used to describe an invisible barrier where women are deprived of opportunities at all levels of employment and are discriminated only because they are women. No doubt women have the potential to achieve an equal footing with men. But, it is the social practices and male attitudes that are making an effective and invisible barrier preventing women from rising above a certain point. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grass root problem. Swami Vivekananda had said "That nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future" and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work towards giving women their much deserved status.

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