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## CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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### Abstract

The economic participation of women and their presence in the work force in quantitative terms is important not only for minimizing the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step towards raising household income, capability creation and decision-making within and outside household. Hence, it concerns not only the actual number of their participation in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. In this particular context Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women fewer passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation. There is strong evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their capabilities and contribute to economic development. This research paper to be discussed Challenges for inclusive Economic Empowerment of Women in India

**Keywords:** Inclusive Growth, Economic Opportunities, Women Empowerment, Employment, Equal Status, Feminist Ideology.

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

**"Truly women have a place, truly women have a face and truly the world has not been functioning well without the input, in every sphere, of women."**

**Leymah Gbowee**

Noble Laureate, Activist and Social Worker

In India women produce 30 percent of all food commodities consumed but get only 10 percent of the property of wealth of the country. There is a growing realization that rural women in India have been underestimated and discriminated against all walks of their economic opportunities in life, despite their substantial contributions to household economy in particular and in turn, the national economy as a whole. Hence, the inclusive empowerment of women and improvement of their status and economic role needs to be integrated with economic opportunity as the development of any country is inseparably linked with the status of the economic independence of women by breaking the vicious circle of deprivation for availing economic opportunity. Experience has shown that promotion of enterprise and the development of micro-finance along with income earning activities among rural women by getting equal economic opportunity would only transform them from 'being alive' to 'living with dignity'.

Since the 1980's the Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women. International organizations like the World Bank and United Nations have focused on women's issues especially the empowerment of poor women in rural areas. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken on an increased role in the area of women's empowerment. NGO's, previously catering to women's health and educational needs have moved beyond this traditional focus to address the underlying causes of deprivations through promoting the economic and social empowerment of women.

The year 1993 witnessed two constitutional amendments, i.e., 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> which guaranteed 1/3<sup>rd</sup> representation to women at local self-Government (rural as well as urban). The Government of India had ushered in the need millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women's empowerment year' to focus as a vision 'Where women are equal partners like men. The last few decades have witnessed some basic changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches from the concept of 'Welfare' in the seventies to development in the eighties to empowerment in the nineties and 2001 as the 'women Empowerment Year'.

### Objectives

- To evaluate the issues relating to women and the present state of Indian economy.
- To examine the challenges before Indian women for their inclusive economic state.
- To study the empowerment of women in Indian Society.



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## Methodology

The present study is a doctrinal for this study the author tried to bring out the issues relating to women kind the present state of Indian economic and challenges before the Indian women for their inclusive economic status, empowerment of women in Indian society. Finally, the author tried to present conclusions to be drawn in the content of above discussion.

## Hypothesis

In ancient India women held a high status in our society. Rig-Veda and other scriptures provide the great historic reflection about the status of Indian women and their heroic deeds from Vedic period to the modern times. Even in the face of many social, economic and political changes along with civil customs and traditions, the theme has been debated intensely. Thus, it has given much more attention to the social scientists, economists, the political leaders, social reformers and academician in their respective fields of studies both at micro and macro-level during the last four decades. As such, many separate issues had been interwoven in the literature of women welfare which might arise out of the particular semantically usage of the terms, status of women, women empowerment, gender discrimination/disparity/deprivation, etc.

## Challenges for Inclusive Empowerment of Women in India:

An attempt has been made to analyze the challenges before inclusive economic empowerment of women with respect to their equal economic status for participation in work, and the economic opportunities for independent decision-making and capability creation in face of a highly segregated society with a deep-rooted social malevolence practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. Typically, patriarchal and patrilocal, India continues to be a nation of fairly strict norms with great complementarity between male and female roles with respect to economic participation in work as well as the economic opportunities to be utilized for greater capability creation and decision-making on the part of vast majority of women particularly in rural sector of Indian economy. Indeed, formulating laws and policies for economically empowering women are not enough as there is many practical evidences that most of the times these laws and policies just remain as attractive documents without having effectively helping the crying women for justice? Women are often not treated as 'ends in themselves' persons with dignity who justify respect from laws and institutions instead they are treated instrumentally as reproducers, care givers, sexual receivers, agents of family's general prosperity. Addressing this malice of gender discrimination and economically empowering women in India has been long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which have always been instrumental in a negative way of action against women's growth and development. The issues of economically empowering Indian women are not something which should be tackled by women, themselves rather it is a process of great transformation that requires a mutual understanding, faith and cooperation along with sincerity, honesty and capacity and capabilities on the part of both men and women for positively influencing all round inclusive economic independence, opportunities and distributive justice to the vast majority of rural women.

## Impact of Globalization, liberalization, Privatization:

With the process of globalization, liberalization and privatization of the Indian economy, new challenges for the realization of the goal of inclusive economic status of women have given birth to the issues of women's equality and its negative impact on weakening working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal sector and rural areas. It is argued by the feminist that the new policies would have definite negative impact on the majority of women through reduction in their employment, fall in their family resources. Withdrawal subsidized food, and abandonment of preferential and affirmative policies which have further marginalized the majority of women for access to employment and equality of employment. Female workers would be exploited by the free market economy in areas where women would have also disadvantageous position. Besides, with growing mechanism for privatization of education and health institution, the high cost would deprive a large number of women and poor in getting education and health facilities. The unprecedented rise in food prices have definite impact to wider economic disparities particularly in rural India and the feminization of poverty all over the country in general. Hence, one of the challenges before the Government would have to design new policies and to do up the old policies particularly from the point of view of the poor women at village level so that they can to meet the negative social and economic impact of the globalization process.

For meeting all those challenges as discussed, we have pin-pointedly suggested the following line of direction and positive plan of action for managing, maintaining, regulating, expanding and sustaining the inclusiveness for economically empowering women. It is only the economic status that can make a deeper inter linkage between their social status and political independence, freedom of mind, creativity and above all the greater participatory roles and responsibilities for meeting their log lasting goal of effective freedom.



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### **Evaluating the Ground Level Plan of Action-Need for on Inclusive outlook**

We have to accept the fact that things are not going to change overnight but because of this we cannot stop taking action either. At this juncture, the most important step is to initiate ground level actions whatever small it might see. The ground level actions should be focused towards changing the social attitude and practices prevalent in the society which are highly biased against women. This can be initiated by working with the women at the grassroots level and focusing their control over decision-making. Further, working on the aspect of enhanced mobility and social interaction of women in the society would have positive influence for all round development and the inclusive economic empowerment to women in India.

### **Before the Implementation of Policies-Need for Reality check on the specific Points**

Today, there are lots of things that are happening in the name of women empowerment in India and lot of resources are spent in this direction. Keeping this in and, it is crucial to have a reality check on what is happening on paper and what is the actual ground situation. It is worthwhile to ponder on the fact that we are one of the worst in terms of worldwide gender equality ranking. In India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, economic opportunity and economic participation or the political participation, access to education or access to nutrition and reproductive health care. A significant few in the society still consider women as sex objects. Gender disparity is high; crimes against women is all time high and, in most cases, go unreported. Dowry related problems and death is increasing and is profoundly manifesting in the urban population. Workplace harassment of women is another phenomenon which is rapidly increasing as more women join the workforce. Early age marriages are still taking place in large numbers and the number of girl's going to school is abysmally low. Moreover, majority of the girls who join the school drop out by the age of puberty to get married and live a life of drudgery. Female feticide and infanticide is starring the nation as one of the biggest social crises. All this is happening despite the fact that there are number of programmers and policy initiatives that are being run by the government and other bodies. The year 2001 was declared as the national Policy for Empowerment of Women. So, it is time to ask the question whether we are moving in the right direction and where are we in terms of the paper actions without having the actual ground realities.

### **Circumstances of Action-Needs for Creativity towards Positive attitude**

One of the major aspects of women empowerment in India is to change the attitude of society towards women. The problem in India is that the society never worked on the premise of gender equality from a long-long time. Atrocities and discrimination against women is a way of daily life in Indian society. There is an attitude which still prevails in India where women are considered to be only worthwhile of household activities and managing the children. The veil system, child marriage and dowry are testimonies to thesis truth. Women have never been part of the mainstream society in India and they are still considered as a great liability. If we just look at the sex ratio it will show the plight of women in India. It is the lower at around 933. Female literacy is just 65.5n per cent as per 2011 Census. In Indian parliament and assemblies women have never represented more than 10 per cent. Most of the women workers in India are outside the organized sector. Administrators, managers, Professionals combined together and technical workers on the other hand are the lowest at 2.3 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. Now these figures give the real truth of the women and discriminated against them quite openly.

### **Existing Women Empowerment Programme**

As we know that the Government had declared 2001 as the women's empowerment year but nothing much has happened even after that. Women even today are not able to exercise full control over their circumstances or actions from welfare society at the inception. India moved on to embrace the developmental model and now the latest trend is the empowerment model. But with all these initiatives however genuine they might have been or they are nothing substantial has happened on the grassroots ground. Majority of Women in India are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill-equipped family and are not in a position to propel themselves of the oppressive and regressive social and economic conditions. Female infanticide is one of the biggest crimes against humanity that is being carried out in India. The patriarchal system encourages a male child and considers girls and women as a property or liability from the day of their birth. We need to accept the truth that there is a great discrepancy in the ideology and the actual practice of empowerment policy in India. Everything is happening at a very superficial level and the time has come to find an action-oriented path at the ground level for real and measurable change.

There are quite large women empowerment programmes in India as well as initiating actual work at the ground level. Women make up to 52 per cent of country's population but their living conditions are very tough and torturous. To initiate measurable actions art 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, 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



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which are currently overburdening the women to no end. Unless we improve the ground level living standards of women in India, we might not be able to influence their inclusive empowerment in any other possible way. Various issues that need to be addressed for improving overall economic conditions of the women in India include making access to affordable cooking fuel for rural women, providing safe drinking water, sanitation, increasing decision-making capacity among women, providing equal wages as threat of men, ending their exploitation, improving the political participation of 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.

### **Ending Gender Inequality and Bias-Unification of Inclusive Women Force**

It has to be understood that unless we change the basic social attitude which cultivates gender inequality and gender bias, we would not be able to achieve much in terms of inclusive women empowerment in India. There are many laws and there have been many amendments that have been carried out to end the discrimination against women and empower women in all aspects of life. Gender equality is enshrined in Indian constitution and constitution empowers the state to end the gender-based discrimination against women. There is reservation of seats to local bodies and municipalities and another law is being envisioned for reservation in lower house of parliament. But the sad part is that all these laws and amendments have become truth as the fundamental problems lies in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against women. The only solution for women is to come together as unifying force and initiate self-empowering actions are the ground level. Let it happen even if, it is at a slow pace initially but it must happen despite however small the initial steps might look like. So, the connection is very clear. Once we work towards self-empowerment through small number of initiative actions, we become aware of the round realities and then we can think about taking further recourse towards changing the mindset of the society which fosters gender inequality and bias.

### **More stringent Legislations are required for ending Violence against Women**

When we talk about women empowerment in India the most important aspect that comes into the mind is the attitude of the society towards women. Women are still considered as burden and liabilities. They are also considered as properties. These kinds of attitudes give birth to the evil of violence against women. Women empowerment in India is not possible unless violence against women in eradicated from the society, national Commission of Women was created in 1992 and convention of elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was ratified in 1993. Apart from the laws and policy formulations, the violence against women can be only tackled through attitudinal change and proactive action against violence by every single individual will help in galvanizing the slumbering structures of the government and society towards further concrete steps and action. Unless society accepts gender equality as a fundamental principle of human existence all efforts will only partially bear results. Gender sensitization and gender training is primary need of the hour. The struggle of gender equality should be carried at every level and it should overcome the barriers of caste, class, race and religion.

### **Whole Hearted Inclusive cooperation among Women Need of Enthusiasm**

To reemphasize once again, women’s empowerment cannot take place unless women come together and decide to self-empower themselves, self-empowerment should be all round in nature. Once this happens then we can think about galvanizing the system towards the direction of better health facilities, nutrition and educational facilities for women at a very large scale, self-empowerment can begin by addressing day-to-day issues faced by individual women and tackling them with a mindset of improving the overall living conditions of women at every level and strata of the society. A movement has to be built up for awakening each and every woman for creative and generative action. In this regard progressive and resourceful women in the society need to come forward to help their less privileged sisters in as many ways as possible. This shall help us to transplant the seed for real women empowerment in Indian soil.

### **Protecting the Right of the Girl Child - All Forms of Inclusive Positive Measures Required**

All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violation of their rights are prevalent in India. All sort of such forms of discrimination are to be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. All through National Policy for the empowering of women (2001) had stressed much on these aspects of discrimination against the girl, yet in practical sense. They are existing at an alarming rate particularly in rural sector of the Indian economy. Still, there is a strong preference for son’s results in the neglect of girl and female infants. The Child Mortality Rate among Female (CMRF) and Infant Mortality Rate among Female (IMRF) are in terrible situation in states like M.P, Orissa, U.P Rajasthan. Bihar and Gujarat, Despite the 1976 amendment to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, it is found by the National Family Health survey of (2001-02) that as high as 619 of girls are married by the time, they are 18. A survey in Rajasthan found 17 per cent of all girls have married before they have attended the age of 10 years while 3 per cent are being married before they are 5 years old (Gonsalve, 2005). All such forms of exploitation and discrimination on the right of the girl child needs positive action not on paper but to a realistic way of implementing



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positive measures on the part of the central and state Governments. Hence there is an urgent need for special emphasis for earmarking, substantial investment for eliminating exploitation of girl child relating to food and nutrition, health and education. A special focus is essential not only to change the attitudes of our society but an effective manner, so that such forms of malpractices can be eliminated from the root of their germination.

### Translating Inclusive policies in to a set of Concrete Actions-A Time Bond Action Plans are required at Central and State levels

All Central and State Ministries must draw up time bond action plants with respect to the measurement of goals relating to policies, identification of commitment of resources involved into the plan, responsibilities and accountabilities for implementation of action points, structuring of the plan for efficient monitoring, review of the impact of action point and policies on women and on introduction of a gender perspectives from the angle of the gender budgeting process. All aspects as analyzed must be founded with realistic approach on the basis of a time bond action plan for translating the policies into a set of concrete action.

### Role of Mass media to Build up Realistic Guidelines to Protecting the Women Dignity and Images

Media has a very special role to portray the images of women consistent with their dignity specially strive to remove demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against them. Private sector partners and media network must involve themselves inclusively at all such to ensure equal opportunities for women particularly for the to develop codes of conduct, professional guidelines and other self-regulatory mechanism for promoting balance portrayals of women and men.

We may conclude inclusive empowerment to the vast majority of women in India not only calls for well-planned efforts either on the part of central and state governments or on NGOs and the organization for women, it also demands sustained commitment to try and enhance what has been achieved. A necessity for transforming the mindsets of society for inclusively empowering the Indian women need not create any progressive and grassroots. Plan of action unless we actually do work for it, typically we have to plan it carefully too. It is the basis of, and the need for, that commitment that can be seen as the central message for inclusive empowerment to Indian women.

### Summing Up

Keeping in view all those aspects into consideration, the present section would try to identify the ways and means to cope with the challenges that are making a great huddle for inclusive economic empowerment to Indian Women. Although there are limited number of self-actualized women at urban level mostly from the upper-class family who have all sort of accesses to manage, maintained, regulate and sustain their capabilities in their respective protective professional areas in connection with economic participation as well as to avail the economic opportunities. But the vast majority of rural women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes and minorities in the informal unorganized sector have remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded from the developmental goal and objectives even after the commitment and the current slogan of Eleventh Five Year Plan for inclusive growth strategy. Although the National Policy for the empowerment of women (2001) has given a clear vision to bring about the advancement, development and empowering women for creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated and the prevailing situational reality of the inclusive economic status of women in India. The legal-judicial system and the constitutional provisions, legislations, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanism have been less responsive in practical sense of them especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. More stringent laws are required to be enacted and the existing laws are to be reviewed for ensuring quick justice with the severity of the offence, keeping in view the ground level realities.

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