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## CONTRIBUTION OF WORKING WOMEN IN INDIAN ECONOMY AND PROBLEMS FACED BY THEM

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**"Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength."**

—G.D. Anderson

### ABSTRACT

India has experienced rapid growth and development in the past years in many spheres. Gender equity is one of them. This is deplorable considering the important role played by women in the socio-economic growth of the country. From ancient to modern period, women's condition-socially, politically and economically- has not remained same and it kept changing with times. India's Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution safeguard women's rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically. In India, women have faced a range of structural and social barriers in fully participating in the Indian economy, which not only hinders their individual agency but also limits India's ability to continue to modernize. This research paper aims to focus on the contribution made by the working women in India towards the Indian economy and various problems faced by them.

**KEYWORDS:** Working Women, Rights, Problems, Indian Economy, Opportunities.

### INTRODUCTION

The Women workforce has been playing a very significant role in the expansion and growth of the Indian economy, and is now a force to reckon with. Over the years their contribution has been increasing - vindicating the hypothesis of leading feminists that women are second to none in the world.<sup>1</sup> Women's participation in work is an indicator of their status in a society. Where women's work participation rates are relatively low, it is safe to say that the surrounding society isn't giving women the capacities, opportunities and freedom to engage in productive work, nor recognizing the vast amount of work performed by women as unpaid labor.<sup>2</sup>

In the era of globalization, the role of Indian women at home and work has taken a multifaceted dimension. India being one of the fastest growing economies, the contribution of women is growing at a steady pace. Most Indian women by and large undertake "productive work" only under the economic compulsion. Most of the women are found to be employed in agricultural activities and in the unorganized sector, the employment of women is high in certain works such as part time helpers in households, construction centers, tanneries, match box etc. A central driver of economic growth over the past century has been the increased role of women. This empowerment comes in many forms: increased female labor force participation, reduced discrimination and wage differentials that encourage greater effort, and improved advancement practices that promote talented women into leadership and managerial roles. Empowerment of women need to begin with her participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated to be aware of their rights and privileges in a modern society. It is education which can bring about awareness in them related to their social status, injustice and differentiation meted out to them. Besides, economic independence is a major factor which can contribute in empowering women.<sup>3</sup>

The contribution which is made by the Indian women in the Indian economy has always been understated. Somewhere till the 20th Century, in the early 1900s, women were expected to stay at home, and those who wanted to work were often stigmatized. Today it's mostly the other way round.<sup>4</sup> In which category, for example, can we place a housewife and her contribution towards generating

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.merineews.com/article/women-playing-an-important-role-in-indian-economy/15845183.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Jayati Ghosh, Women are the engines of Indian Economy but our contribution is ignored, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jul/16/womens-workforce-participation-declining-india>.

<sup>3</sup> Prakhar Mandhre, A Review On: Role of Women In Indian Economy, I J R T E R - Special Issue; November 2016, [ISSN: 2455-1457].

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://nirja-thediaryofahousewife.blogspot.in/2013/03/contribution-of-housewife-to-society.html>(Visited on August 3, 2021).



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economic activities right from her home starting from early hours till late in the night and in between attending to farming activities including dairy and other activities like horticulture, floriculture and maintaining one full family. If these activities right from heavy domestic chorus to farming, weaving, manufacturing, cottage and village level activities do not contribute to the building up of economy then what else could be said about it? Female labor force participation at a phenomenal level and in varied forms contribute to building up of the economy in a massive way. Let us look at the concept of investments apart from the usual one in our minds and in modern parlance. Have we discovered the quantum of women centric economy in as much as the level of their investment in Human Capital, for example their role in bringing up and teaching their children or getting them imparted trainings in various skills? That is the human capital which is used for generating incomes and production in agriculture and industry.<sup>5</sup>

Why the contribution of Indian women towards achieving tremendous progress has not been highlighted so far, finds its reason of the prevalence of gender bias existing at every social stratum, even in the most educated and developed pockets of our society. Their contribution to the economy from the rural areas by direct engagement in direct and allied agricultural activities is notable. They, mostly in rural and semi urban areas run small retail shops, selling by-products, marketing milk and allied dairy items, all contribute in generating additional incomes for the family, a portion of which goes into savings. A study shows that more than 40% of the rural women directly or indirectly contribute in uplifting of their families and thus bring about much desired social change. Even in Urban and Metropolitan areas, their active participation as a labor force is responsible to a larger extent in creating national assets. Not only that, their contribution in building roads, canals, bridges, water bodies in addition to their engagement in various domestic and community services cannot be sidelined. After achieving independence, the critical role played by women in India to work together and forge unity within the families, frustrate fragmentation of land holdings and with the passage of time, their role in Panchayats in taking vital developmental decisions have all shown their capability as well as their contribution towards economic development. Their contribution at the grass root level, apart from Panchayats, in cooperatives like Gujarat's Dairy revolution thus contributing towards socio-economic development and generating incomes, cannot be underestimated. This has undoubtedly paved the way for sustainable development and economic growth of the country. With the spread of education and with doing away with gender bias under schemes like "Beti bachao, Beti Padhao", the role of Indian women in building the economy has limitless scope.<sup>6</sup> Despite their immensely important and vital role in the economic development of the country, women in the Indian Economy are facing severe problems.

### PROBLEMS FACED BY THE WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

1. **Malnutrition:** Although the GDP growth rate of the India is 9%, and women are able to subsidize the cost of agricultural products by Rs. 93000 crores per year, we see that 52% of women face the problem of malnutrition. When the whole of the nation enjoys subsidized food, the actual producers of the grain remain deprived of it.<sup>7</sup>
2. **Discrimination at Workplace:** However, Indian women still face blatant discrimination at their workplaces. A major problem faced by the working women is sexual harassment at the work place. Further, women employees working in night shift are more vulnerable to such incidents. Nurses, for example, face this problem nearly every day. There is nothing that is done in hospitals to tackle and address the danger they face. Such blatant disregard of current Indian laws is one reason why sexual harassment at the workplace continues to increase. Also, Indian women are often deprived of promotions and growth opportunities at work places but this doesn't apply to all working women. A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues. This is usually the case in factories and labor-oriented industries.<sup>8</sup>
3. **Acceptance As Working Professionals:** Most Indian men are yet to come to terms with the fact that women are also capable of working with them, shoulder to shoulder, in any field or professional sphere. They still visualize women as individuals who should be in charge of the kitchen and other domestic affairs. Work is either seen as a temporary evil for women whose husbands do not earn enough, or the domain of women who do not "know their place." As a result, Indian working women do not get the respect they require from their male colleagues in the workplace.<sup>9</sup>
4. **Balancing Work-Family Life:** No matter how high their position or designation is in the office, women in India are still viewed as the family manager back home. They are expected to return home at a certain time, cook, clean and take care of

<sup>5</sup>Shiban Khaibri, Role of Women in Indian Economy, Available at: <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/role-of-women-in-indian-economy/> (Visited on August 3, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://womennow.in/womens-contribution-to-economic-stability/> (Visited on July 30, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://www.legalindia.com/problems-faced-by-working-women-in-india/> (Visited on July 31, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <http://www.naree.com/working-women-india-problems-status/> (Visited on July 30, 2021).



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family affairs. In fact, men who help out around their house are often the butt of jokes by their male friends. This makes life extremely stressful for women who have little help around the house and have to do it all.<sup>10</sup>

5. **Low Dignity and No Ownership of Her Own Earning:** Mostly women are not seen as independent earners, who command respect and dignity. Instead, is seen as a small back-wheel of a heavy vehicle and thus, her role and contribution are mostly over looked. In most of the families, especially middle class, upper middle class and lower middle class; it's seen that the income of the woman either goes in the hands of her father or husband, rather than in her hands.<sup>11</sup>

There are numerous reasons today women step out of their home: to work and to earn, to mark her identity, to be independent, to earn a living, to run her family or to support her husband run the family. Breaking off her traditional image of home maker, women today are taking up new roles and challenges of work and career. A woman plays so many roles (of daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother...) and for ages has been a multi-tasker; one who cook food, does the domestic works, raises kids, and cares for everyone. She works 24X7, never complains and asks no remuneration. Her tasks and challenges have increased and hardened multifold now when she is super multi-tasking; juggling between career, travelling, kitchen, kids, husband, house, society, personal health, passion and desires. Balancing between so many duties and obligations, a woman faces numerous challenges and problems every day, every time, and may be every second minute or second.<sup>12</sup> Besides facing various problems at personal as well as at professional level, women are making a significant contribution in the Indian Economy. Women play a substantial role in the economy of India, and their contribution must be recognized with full appreciation. Women must be empowered and facilitated, so that their productivity may be increased. Women workers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care etc. The exploitation of female laborers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. There is a severe need to recognize their work and give a safe environment to women workers. The most important determining factor to such in access and denial primarily evolves out of poor literacy and lack of awareness resulting in self-exclusion from the mainstream opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://lazy-blogger.com/challenges-problems-of-a-working-woman/> (Visited on July 30, 2021)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Available at: [http://www.ijrter.com/published\\_special\\_issues/30-11-2016/a-review-on-role-of-women-in-indian-economy.pdf](http://www.ijrter.com/published_special_issues/30-11-2016/a-review-on-role-of-women-in-indian-economy.pdf). (Visited on August 3, 2021)