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The Socio-Political and Economical Development and Women

ABSTRACT ::

This paper presents the findings of some research on the social political and the economic role of women and their contribution in socio political and economic development. She is companion of man, gifted with equal mental faculty, a protector and provider, the embodiment of love and affection. The role given to women in a society is a measuring rod and true index of its civilization and cultural attainment. With the dawn of freedom, particularly during India's national struggle, the position of women took a turn for the better. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Dr Rajendra Prasad began to think deeply about the urgent need of women's emancipation. They realized that so long as women of the country were not uplifted and granted equal status with men in all walks of life – political, social, economic, domestic, educational, India could neither progress nor make any significant advance in any field. Now with the encouragement of co-education, women have cast off the age old inferiority complex and are matching side by side with men in every walk of life. Women are actually proving to be academically better and socially more active.

INTRODUCTION:

OUR WOMEN have a great part to play in the progress of our country, as the mental and physical contact of women with life is much more lasting and comprehensive than that of men. For nothing was it said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". In the apron string of women is hidden the revolutionary energy, which can establish paradise on this earth – Dr Rajendra Prasad.

Woman is the magnificent creation of god, a multi faceted personality with the power of benevolence, adjustability, integrity and tolerance. She is companion of man, gifted with equal mental faculty, a protector and provider, the embodiment of love and affection. The role given to women in a society is a measuring rod and true index of its civilisation and cultural attainment.

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History ::

There are very few texts specifically dealing with the role of women; an important exception is the strIdharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan, an official at Thanjavur around c.1730. The text compiles strictures on womenly behaviour dating back to the Apastamba sutra (c. 4th c. BCE) The opening verse goes:

mukhyo dharmah smr^tiShu vihito bhart^r^shushruShANam hi :
 the primary duty of women is enjoined to be service to one's husband.

Ancient India ::

Scholars believe that in ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. However, some others hold contrasting views. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period Rigvedic verses

suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Scriptures such as Rig Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi.

Some kingdoms in the ancient India had traditions such as nagarvadhu. Women competed to win the coveted title of the nagarvadhu. Amrapali is the most famous example of a nagarvadhu.

According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later (approximately 500 B.C.), the status of women began to decline with the Smritis (esp. Manusmriti) and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity curtailing women's freedom and rights.

Historical practices :::

Traditions such as sati, jauhar, and devadasi have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some cases of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practiced by many Indian women, and child marriage remains prevalent despite it being an illegal practice, especially under current Indian laws.

Independent India ::

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

The feminist activism in India picked up momentum during later 1970s. One of the first national level issues that brought the women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station, led to a wide-scale protests in 1979–1980. The protests were widely covered in the national media, and forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists united over issues such as female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy.

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India, many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and other states. Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticized the triple talaq system.

In 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements. For example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women came was passed in 2001.

Woman's Status::

Women account for roughly half the world's population, perform two-thirds of the hours worked, receive one-tenth of the world's income, and have less than one hundredth of the world's property registered in their names. Female deprivation is particularly acute in the developing countries with high levels of poverty, though in affluent nations women also suffer low status due to conservative attitudes.

The most dramatic and telling statistic of women's status is the sex-ratio in the population, that is, the number of females per 100 males. It is a well-known fact that life-expectancy at birth favours females. This appears to be a biological constant. Yet, the proportion of females to males varies greatly across different regions of the world. For example, the proportion of females is 52.5% in the industrialised world but in sub-Saharan Africa women account for only 51% of the population. The figures are 48% of the population in East Asia and less than 47% in South Asia. From figures such as these, economist Amartya Sen has estimated that there are 100 million women "missing" in the world. Sen describes the fate of these women as "one of the more momentous problems facing the contemporary world." This is a moral as well as a development-related problem.

The overwhelming reason why 100 million women are missing in the world is excess female mortality. In the developed world, women outlive men by an average of six years; by contrast, in large parts of South Asia, men can expect to live longer than women.

Differential mortality is only the most dramatic manifestation of systematic discrimination against females. Women and girls are more likely to be impoverished than men and boys. Also, studies have found that girls are fed less than their brothers and that their illnesses are less likely to be treated. It should come as no surprise then that, in most regions of the world, female literacy and education fall far short of male literacy and education, as shown in Table 1. While poverty and cultural factors must surely influence the extent of female deprivation, they do not explain it entirely. For example, sub-Saharan Africa is one of the poorest regions of the world but the problem of excess mortality of females is much less severe there than in South Asia.

Region	Adult Literacy	Primary enrolment	Secondary enrolment	Tertiary enrolment
Nordic countries	—	100	101	121
OECD	—	99	98	103
All Developing Countries	73	88	78	70
Least Developed Countries	57	84	67	44
Arab states	61	92	77	65
East Asia	80	96	79	73
Latin America and Caribbean	97	98	98	70
South Asia	55	75	60	48
SE Asia and the Pacific	90	97	95	73
sub-Saharan Africa	66	85	72	46

Source: Human Development Report 1995, Annex table A2.6, page 68.
Notes: The figures relate to women's education in relation to men's, the index for men being 100. Thus, for example, in least developed countries, the adult literacy rate for women was only 57% that of men, while in Latin America and in the Caribbean, it was 97% that of men.

Role of Woman in Social Development ::

Woman is the magnificent creation of god, a multi faceted personality with the power of benevolence, adjustability, integrity and tolerance. She is companion of man, gifted with equal mental faculty, a protector and provider, the embodiment of love and affection. The role given to women in a society is a measuring rod and true index of its civilisation and cultural attainment.

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Gandhiji gave a clarion call for women's participation in the freedom movement. Sarojini Naidu, Meera Ben, Sucheta Kripalani, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali were some of the leading women freedom fighters. In the post independence, women have played a significant role as doctors, engineers, judges, pilots, scientists, diplomats, legislators and even as prime minister.

Indira Gandhi, our late prime minister, was held in high esteem the world over. Vijayalakshmi Pandit created a record by becoming the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly. In the modern age, we find the role of women in every field. The myth that certain fields were only meant for men has been demolished by women. Women have proved to be more vibrant, dynamic, sincere and perfect in every field. They have the ability to immerse themselves wholly in any task they undertake.

Modern women in the present age occupy top rank and attain immense success in all the fields such as sports, politics, performing arts, police, administration, medicine and etc. Mother Teresa, P T Usha, M S Subbulakshmi, Kiran Bedi, Dr Padmavathi, Sushma Swaraj, the great environmentalist and social activist Medha Patkar and Promilla Kalhan have become great names in different fields of their work.

Now with the encouragement of co-education, women have cast off the age old inferiority complex and are marching side by side with men in every walk of life. Women are actually proving to be academically better and socially more active. When we come across the results of competitive examinations in all India civil services and Indian universities we are happily surprised to note that women capture most of the merit seats. They are also aware of the fast changing social milieu and they are making sustained efforts to scale the leaders of social progress by dint of their zeal and dynamism. They are contributing extensively towards the social transformation and building of the nation.

Women writers like Mahashweta Devi, Pratibha Roy, Arundati Roy have established their credentials in the modern literary world and contributed to the literacy excellence of the nation. It is heartening to know that today we have in India the educated women who are very keen on taking up administration work. We are amazed to see the fantastic work. Women are serving as officers, typists, clerks and receptionists. It has been noticed that they are quick to understand every work and have won the applause from the bureaucracy.

In the field of healthcare also women as doctors and nurses can give a healing touch to patients. It has been found that women on account of their tender hearts are better nurses and due to their naturally delicate and soft hands they are better doctors. Therefore it can be said, "A woman's voice is a cure and her touch a balm".

Even in the area of family planning women can render admirable service of explaining to the village women the importance of family planning by taking into them confidence and can guide them by creating awareness about different methods of birth control. If all educated women accept the challenge of time and make up their mind to serve the nation in checking the population growth, it will greatly put in to the socio-economic evolution of the nation.

Women are no longer physically unfit for military and police departments. In the whole length and breadth of India, everyone has read and heard of Kiran Bedi, an IPS officer with an iron hand and a soft heart craving for reformation in the state of prisons in India. India doesn't lack in womanpower. With the leadership taken by Ahluwalia we shall soon have skilled women pilots to take up to the realm of the sky.

Really women are less selfish and more dedicated to duty and have much patience than men by nature. In order to make optimum use of our vast womanpower, we must liberate Indian woman of many social taboos. However, mere legislation cannot emancipate the lot of our women. This needs a

radical change in our mental make up and our social structure. For this, we shall have to foster a social emancipating spirit in our everyday life. The conservative male chauvinistic attitude shall have to give way to liberalism. It can be said with a sense of pride and confidence that the future of women in India is quite bright and prosperity will be safe in their hands.

In order to give them more scope of participation in the economic growth of the country, the government has implemented major programs like Mahila Samridhi Yojana, women's development corporation, etc. The female literacy on the whole is on the rise. According to Rabindranath Tagore, "Woman is god's best creation," she adds beauty and charm to every aspect of life.

To quote former Ms Universe Sushmita Sen, "Women in India have now become more aware of their rights as individuals and they are now opting for higher positions at work at the same time being a perfect housewife at home". This is the stage at which women have reached today.

Emotional, affectionate, caring and yet firm, a woman is the perennial source of inspiration for man in the odyssey of life. Women like Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Margaret Thatcher, Chandrika Kumaratunga have left a indelible mark not only on their nations but also at international level.

Modern women have risen far above the domestic drudgery. They are educated and aware enough to deal with any situation competently. In the present times, they are no longer the inanimate objects. They have struggled hard to establish the identity of their own. They possess enough strength and self-confidence in a brave new world. It reminds one of Lord Byron, who said, "There is a tide in the affairs of women God knows nowhere!" In the present chaotic world, only women can handle any difficulty with patience and perseverance.

Indeed it was Gandhiji who succeeded in raising the position of women in India by making them conscious of their rights. As a result of the efforts of Gandhiji, the position of women has changed and they are gradually emerging as a force in social, cultural as well as political fields of our country. The talent, patience, inner strength, power of tolerance, insight, efficiency of a responsible and good woman helps in the governance of the country and its overall progress.

Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "A sufficient measure of civilisation is the influence of good women". Victor Hugo once said, "Men have sight, women insight." Women run to extremes, take advanced measures for the progress of the country with their power of mental strength and extraordinary talent. Women have occupied a pivotal position today and have achieved eminence in different fields. In the present times, several women's organizations are working for the enlightenment of women of India.

Despite hurdles like male chauvinism and indifference towards them, women have proved their worth as teachers, administrators, officers, entrepreneurs, doctors, engineers, nurses, and computer scientists and almost in all the spheres of activity contributing to social transformation and nation building.

Now, the women in India are heading towards advancement and by dint of their devotion, dedication and determination, women like Mother Teresa, Ramadevi, Bhagini Nivedita, Indira Gandhi and many more others played a vital role in the transformation of the nation socially.

'Mother's Day' is a real tribute to women who shaped generation after generation. It is high time we enact the legislation for reservation for women in parliament. Women have proved their credentials in panchayats and municipalities.

Role of Women in political Development ::

Through the Panchayat Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Although the percentages of women in various levels of political activity has risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decisionmaking positions.

Some of the notable women leaders in India include Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Sheila Dikshit, Jayalalitha, Uma Bharati, Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee Sindhu Joyand Sonia Gandhi. On July 25, 2007 the country's ever first woman president Pratibha Patil was sworn in.

India has recently announced the National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001 with the following goal and objectives in Article 1.11: e.g., The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals.

Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include: e.g.,

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
2. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres– political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
3. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
4. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
6. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The Government of India has drawn up a draft National Policy for the empowerment of women, which is a policy statement outlining the legal, institutional and programmatic response of the state to problems of gender discrimination. This policy makes the review of all existing laws to be gender sensitive.

The judiciary in India also has come in favor of women's issues striking down rules and regulations placing restriction on employment of married women or required unmarried women to resign on marriage.

The Finance Minister of India has announced that the year 2001 will be observed as Women Empowerment Year. He also announced setting up of a task force to chalkout specific programmes for observing the year 2001 as Women Empowerment Year. The announcement has been made in the context of an urgent need for improving the access of women to national resources and for ensuring their rightful place in the mainstream of economic development.

The government is committed to improve the status of women in India and towards this end apart from the constitutional guarantee, several schemes and programmes have been planned and executed from time to time, the objective of the women's empowerment year is to create large scale awareness with the active participation of women themselves. The programme to be taken up for the women's empowerment year inter alia include the followings but not limited to: e.g.,

1. Establishing Technological Park for women
2. National Assessment for on women friendly technology on drudgery reduction, tools and implements and income generation for women.
3. Exhibition on women in science.
4. Women in Information Technology.

Likewise, India has enacted several gender sensitive legislation, followings are some of the work-related legislation for women.

Empowering Woman ::

Women Empowerment" is a government slogan. There is a ministry for Women and Child development. There are laws against, domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. Determined women are carving their own niche in every field including those which were entirely male dominated till 1947. Despite all this they remain second class citizens in almost every sense in rural areas across India. Crime against women continues to increase, female foeticide is very common among educated women, incidents of sati still take place. The head of the family continues to be a man.

Women are made to account for themselves all the time. We are expected to justify our actions. An explanation is demanded from an adult woman if she stays out late while a young teenage boy who stays out all night is not questioned.

The story does not end here. In fact what underlines the inferior status conferred upon woman is their status in the field of politics. Throughout the world women face obstacles to their participation in politics. In 2005, the rate of female representation was only 16% globally. This figure has increased in recent years. The largest democracy in the world India elected its first woman president in its 60th year of independence. This clearly reflects the position of women in Indian politics. The 1940s saw active political participation by Indian women in the national struggle for independence. Woman leaders played a major role in the movement. Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Aruna Asaf Ali were some of the educated, elite women who joined politics in large numbers.

Recent reports in India indicate that many women politicians find it difficult to participate in an effective manner in politics, this points to a pressing need to analyze the role that women play in Indian politics. "Domestic responsibilities, lack of financial clout, growing criminalization of politics and the threat of character assassination" have made it increasingly difficult for women to be part of the political framework. Moreover, women politicians point out that even within the political parties, women are rarely found in leadership positions. Women have different strategies to cope with these constraints. If the family has accepted a woman's career in politics, she can negotiate with her family.

This is more likely if the family is an elite political family with more than one member participating in politics. If the woman was already active in political life before she married, she can face tremendous pressures from her husband's family to conform to a traditional role that allows little scope for pursuing an active political career. A woman politician's options in this case are either to conform to the expectations of the family and retreat from public life, or to leave the family in pursuit of an uncertain future in party politics.

The demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was not taken up in a systematic way, until the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). The CSWI suggested that women's representation in political institutions, especially at the grass-roots level, needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for women.

The majority of women in the Indian Parliament are from the elite class. While their public role challenges some stereotypes, their class position often allows them a far greater range of options than are available to poorer women. Caste has been an important feature of Indian society and political life. Most of the women MPs in the Tenth Parliament were members of the higher castes. It is important to guard against making an easy correlation between caste and political representation. The influence of individual national leaders is also an important factor that militates against the "male equivalence" theory. While Indira Gandhi, for example, did little to promote women's representation in politics, Rajiv Gandhi accepted the principle of reservation of seats for women. He initiated measures that had a direct impact on the inclusion of women in politics.

Women's representation in the parliament, while important on the grounds of social justice and legitimacy of the political system, does not easily translate into improved representation of women's varied interests. While we cannot assume that more women in public offices would mean a better deal for women in general, there are important reasons for demanding greater representation of women in political life. First is the intuitive one: the greater the number of women in public office, articulating interests and seen to be wielding power, the more the gender hierarchy in public life could be weakened. Without sufficiently visible, if not proportionate, presence in the political system -

"threshold representation"¹² – a group's ability to influence either policy-making, or indeed the political culture framing the representative system, is limited. This fact is confirmed by the various other contributions in this volume. Further, the fact that these women are largely elite women might mean that the impact that they have on public consciousness might be disproportionately large in relation to their numbers.

Second and more important, we could explore the strategies that women employ to access the public sphere in the context of a patriarchal socio-political system. These women have been successful in subverting the boundaries of gender and in operating in a very aggressive male-dominated sphere. Could other women learn from this example? The problem here is, of course, precisely that these women are an elite. The class from which most of these women come is perhaps the most important factor in their successful inclusion into the political system. We can, however, examine whether socio-political movements provide opportunities for women to use certain strategies that might be able to subvert the gender hierarchy in politics. Finally, we can explore the dynamics between institutional and grass-roots politics.

Roles of Woman in modern India ::

Role of woman in modern India can be called as phenomenon. The transition of woman from the past to present is worth mentioning. Woman who once considered to be the masters in the art of home making are now considered to be the forces that shape a country.

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women"-Jawaherlal Nehru. As said by our first prime minister today's woman have changed the world's way in which they look at us and our country. Today many women are well educated and they are now into different professions. They manage the team, show leadership qualities, act tactfully during crises and what not they also have their hand in changing the political picture of our country by contributing 56% of electoral roll. You hardly find an industry/sector where you wouldn't find women. Even they played a role in developing Akash and Agni missiles as quoted by MR. ABDUL KALAM in one of the gatherings. In politics too they play a significant role, to name a few Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj are cited as powerful politicians. They are passionate about the work they do and opened new dimensions in their life. They now have the right to protest against assaults and discrimination on them. Stringent and strict action is taken against those who abuse women. This change has brought up a new light in the face of women and they began to compete with men in all sectors and industries and paint their mark in a more pleasing way. Agriculture which is considered to be the backbone of India is getting more and more feminized. Comprising the majority of agricultural laborers, women have been putting in labour not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency. In universities/colleges the percentage of women enrollments has increased over the decades and this shows the change in the mind set of the parents in educating their female children. This could bring up positive vibes in the vision of shaping new India.

Role of Woman in Economic Development ::

Woman plays a very important role for an economic development of any country. They directly or indirectly decide an economic condition of the country.

Amartya Sen (1999) studied economic reforms in India and found that income enables other capacities, and argues that economic discrimination is a much "broader concept" and includes additional factors (p.108). Factors such as patriarchy, labor, education, and government initiatives emerged as the main underlying factors affecting the socio-economic status of poor women in India.

Lack of education hinders poor women from realizing their rights, and inhibits access to available resources. Some NGOs offer basic literacy education and formal training programs while others provide knowledge and expertise responding to client needs. Whether acting as relief workers, intermediaries, advocates, or change agents, many NGOs offer some form of formal or informal education to their clients. Improved efforts could increase access to education for poor sectors. However, NGOs work within governmental restrictions – some NGOs may be hesitant to delve into national responsibilities such as the provision of education.

Woman helps to measure different ratios for measuring economic condition through Human Development Index.

Gender Related Development Index ::

The Gender Related Development Index (GDI) is calculated to reflect inequalities between men and women in the three dimensions used in calculating HDI. The three indices, namely, life expectancy index³, education index and GDP index are calculated separately for men and women, and an equally distributed index is calculated for each dimension.

Equally Distributed Index = $\{[(\text{female population share}) (\text{female index}) - 1] + [(\text{male population share}) (\text{male index}) - 1]\} - 1$

The GDI is an average of the three equally distributed indices. The way the GDI is calculated, it will generally be lower than or equal to the HDI. This is because it gives a higher weight to the lower achiever. Interpretation of this index would become ambiguous if the female index is higher for one dimension and lower for another. This is true for a number of countries, like Philippines, Thailand, Korea, Mongolia, Botswana, etc. For India and China the female index is lower for all three dimensions and therefore the deviation of GDI from HDI would reflect gender bias against women. But if we were to look at a country like Korea where female index for education and income is lower than the corresponding index for males but the life expectancy index for females is higher than that for the males, the deviation of GDI from HDI does not have any clear meaning. The UNDP needs to reform this index so that it correctly reflects gender inequalities.

Gender Empowerment Index :: The Gender Empowerment Index (GEM) focuses on women's opportunities and captures gender inequality in three areas:

1. Political participation and decision making power: measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats.
2. Economic participation and decision making power: measured by two indicators – (a) Women's and men's percentage share of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers; and (b) Women's and men's percentage shares of professional and technical positions.
3. Power over economic resources: measured by women's and men's estimated earned income (PPP USD).

According to the estimates (NSS, GOI – 1991), 84% of the economically active women are involved in contribution towards agriculture in India which accounts for 87% of India's GNP. Thus, women play a pivotal role in agriculture development and the management of natural resources. They are often the managers of community natural resources, and have learned to protect these resources in order to preserve them for future generations (managers of sustainability). They have extensive knowledge, experience and common sense on use and management of natural sources.

Women also use natural resources for economic activities, building and repair work, crops and food processing. Sometimes women's needs are in direct conflict with those of men. Poor access to these resources increases the burden on women and leaves no time for other pursuits, such as education, income generation, and cultural and political activities.

India envisions a future in which Indian women are independent and self-reliant. Their participation in remunerative work in the formal and non-formal labor market has increased significantly in the past decade. Women's income is becoming very necessary to households of all types in the wake of globalization and changing economic structures.

It is estimated that India is home to 92 million working women, though 90 per cent of them are working in the unorganized sector. The female Work Participation Rate (WPR) increased from 14.2 per cent in 1971 to 22.3 per cent in 1991. Women's share in the organized sector meanwhile, increased from 11 per cent in 1971 to 15.9 per cent in 1997.

The need of the hour is economic independence for women. To translate this hope into reality, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) has taken up various projects directed towards advancement of women. Besides coordinating various programs, the Department monitors

27 beneficiary-oriented schemes. The concept of a 'Women's Component Plan' was mooted in the Ninth Plan document. This is an important strategy to ensure that not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits from other development sectors flow to women.

The schemes include the Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP) aims to raise the incomes of rural women by updating their skills in the traditional sectors, such as dairy development, animal husbandry sericulture, handloom and social forestry. Since its inception in 1987, this program has benefited 4,48,000 women.

Assistance extended by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for training and skill development, and also for promotion of self-reliance through the generation of income for women in non traditional trades. Till date, 1745 projects have been sanctioned to benefit 2,49,000 women.

Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY), the prosperity of the Girl Child was launched in 1997 and revamped in 1999, with the specific objectives of changing community attitudes towards the girl child, and improving her enrolment and retention in school.

The Department of Rural Employment and Poverty Alleviation of the Ministry of Rural Development has initiated several schemes in which 30 to 40 per cent of the benefits are reserved for women below the poverty line. The underlying philosophy of these schemes is to encourage entrepreneurship and self-help among women.

Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana Scheme (SGSY), the amended and merged version of the erstwhile Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Integrated Rural Development program (IRDP) and Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), was launched in April 1999. It is a holistic credit-cum-subsidy program, covering all aspects of self-employment. The stipulated 40 per cent reservation for women will be implemented through the panchayat samitis (local self-government).

The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) provides facilities for women through training and employment. The Indira Awas Yojana, a part of the JRY, aims at providing houses free of cost to poor people. The houses are allotted to female members, or in the joint names of the husband and wife to enable women to own assets.

A new scheme, called the Trade-Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD), was launched by the Government in 1998. It was designed to generate self-employment for 45,000 women in rural and urban areas. The package involves financial assistance and services through NGOs in the non-farm sector.

The National Bank For Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) links banks with self-help groups with the objective of meeting the credit needs of the poor. As many as 85 per cent of the groups linked with the banks are women's groups.

Women's development corporations set up in 19 States since 1986-87, to play a catalytic role in identifying women entrepreneurs as well as providing consultancy and other assistance.

Support systems set up in the form of 841 working women's hostels for 59,591 working women with 301 crèches/day centers for 7,878 children of working mothers.

In a landmark judgment in the Vishaka Case, the Supreme Court passed an order on 13 August 1997, laying down certain norms and guidelines to be followed by employees while tackling incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace. The Supreme Court has, in March 2000, ruled that Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, be extended to those women (muster roll) employees of municipal corporations and bodies who have been working on daily wages. In 1998, the Central Government Service Rules made provision for paternity leave of 15 days - an important beginning in creating an environment conducive to the equal sharing of family responsibility.

Employment exchanges take special care to cater to the employment needs of the women registered

with them. Women's Cell under the Directorate General of employment and Training (DGE&T) coordinates with the States for the vocational training of women. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) was launched in 1995 in over 200 blocks of India, for the holistic empowerment of women. IMY is being implemented in 238 blocks and till now, 40,000 women's groups have been formed under the scheme. Of these, 3,000 groups were formed in 1999-2000. Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project (Swa Shakti Project), was launched in 1998, for strengthening the process of empowerment of women in six States through the establishment of self-help groups.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), a national credit fund extends credit facilities to poor and needy women. The RMK has extended loans to 20,000 self help groups of women and has a membership of over 3,00,000. It is instrumental in encouraging women to take control of their own development, and has helped build confidence and political awareness. Till today, the RMK has been able to sanction credit limits of more than Rs. 773.6 million, with the help of about 688 NGOs which it works through, and has reached out to more than 3,49,752 women. At the initiative of the DWCD, the process of monitoring the implementation of 27 beneficiary-oriented schemes for women was reviewed by the Prime Minister's Office.

The existing Review Committee has been renamed the Committee for Monitoring of Gender Mainstreaming in the Government to reflect the changed focus. A task force has been constituted in 1999 to review all existing legislation and government schemes with a view to enhancing the access of women to national resources and ensuring that they take their rightful place in the mainstream economic development. The task force will also chalk out specific programs for observing the year 2001 as "Women's Empowerment Year". This is one of the most crucial areas of work that has been taken up by the Government. The primary aim is to make women economically independent and help them gain full confidence in themselves.

So women play a very good role for the social political and economical development of any country.

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