

# Socio-Economic Status of Women in India:- A Study on Transitional Aspect

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## **Abstract:-**

In India, the status of women has been subjected to great many changes from a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers. Therefore, history of women in India has been even full. During the last three hundred years ago; it was a general belief that the role of women is to build and maintain the homely affairs like task of fetching water, cooking, rearing children etc. Various social customs in the Indian society influenced her status negatively as she was expected to be a perfect daughter, a devoted wife and a proud Mother. Hence, the identity of women was institutionalized in the traditional society.

But recent years have brought a great many transitional changes in the life of women all over the world, influencing their attitudes, values, inspirations, ways of feelings and acting for effective participation in all walks of life. Now, there are no such social, economic or any other barriers preventing women from entering any field of economic activity. Hence, women in modern economy make a vital contribution to the industrial output throughout the world. Over two hundred million women are employed across all industrial sectors, in which half of them are in developing countries. Their work in the industrial sectors not only sustains their families but also makes a major contribution to socio- economic progress.

The study of this paper focuses on the transition of women in historical context in perspective to the development of socio and economic status of women in India.

***Key words: Economic Development, Transition, social and economic status, industrial sector, women entrepreneurs***

## **Introduction: -**

Women play a vital role in the Economic development of the country, as her presence is prominent in various fields such as agriculture, industrial organizations, organized and unorganized sectors. Relating to this, the late Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru a great visionary and an architect of modern India felt that the development of women should be given top priority in the pattern of economic development in the country. In India, the transitional change of women has been subjected to great many changes hence the role of women in socio-economic development has undergone a marked change over the years. The world of women is now no longer confined to periphery of house old activity rather today they contribute in the promotion of economic development in different capacities. This has increased the female work

participation rate from 14.22 percent in 1971 to 25.51 percent in 2011. In India 28 million people were employed in organized sector in 2009 compared to 27.7 million people in 2001. Similarly the percentage of women employed in organized sector was increased to 19.9 percent in 2009 compared to 17.8 percent in 2001. As on 31st March, 2009, there were about 55.27 lakhs women workers employed in the organized sector (Public and Private Sector).

This reveals that the attitude of women have changed from house hold activity to economic activity. Thus the status of women in India has undergone a tremendous change over the past few years. Women now in independent India participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sector, science and technology etc.

### **Review of Literature:-**

Development of women is a process that signifies a state of evolvement, maturity, completeness, improvement and positive change transiting to a desirable higher level of quality of life, as we know that women have subordinate character towards gender relationship they experience social structural inequalities and injustices in day today life throughout the years. Therefore increase in the economic status of women strengthens their capacities to overcome the barriers they experienced years together.

During the last three hundred years ago; it was a general belief that the role of women is to build and maintain the homely affairs like task of fetching water, cooking, rearing children etc. Various social customs in the Indian society influenced her status negatively as she was expected to be a perfect daughter, a devoted wife and a proud Mother. Hence, the identity of women was institutionalized in the traditional society.

But, recent years have brought great many changes in the life of women all over the world, influencing their attitudes, values, inspirations, ways of feelings and acting for effective participation in all walks of life.<sup>1</sup> Now, there are no such social, economic or any other barriers preventing women from entering any field of economic activity. Hence, women make a vital contribution to the industrial output throughout the world. Over two hundred million women are employed across all industrial sectors, in which half of them are in developing countries. Their work in the industrial sectors not only sustains their families but also makes a major contribution to socio- economic progress.<sup>2</sup>

### **Objectives:-**

1. To identify the changing role and status of women from ancient society to modern society.
2. Analyzing the efforts made by government for improving the status of women under planning

## **Methodology:-**

The methodology of this paper is purely descriptive and required information is collected from secondary sources.

The objectives are analyzed and discussed below

### **1. To identify the changing role and status of women from ancient society to modern society**

In ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life<sup>3</sup>. Works by ancient Indian Grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Rig Vedic versus suggests that women were married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband.<sup>5</sup>

According to these studies, it reveals that women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later (approximately 500BC) the status of women began to decline with the Smritis (especially manusmritis) and other religious texts curtailing women's freedom and rights. Although, reformatory movements such as Jainism allowed women to admit the religious order by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions.<sup>6</sup>

The Indian women position in the society further deteriorated during medieval period.<sup>7</sup> Sati, child marriages and ban on widow remarriages became part of social life in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian sub-continent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the jauhar (voluntary death) was practiced. In some part of India the devadasi or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practiced among the kristriya rulers<sup>8</sup>. In many Muslim families, women were seduced to zenana [converting them to Christianity].

In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the field of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia sultana became the only women monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. The Gondqueen Durgavati ruled for 15 years before she lost her life in the battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general asaf khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defended Ahemednagar against the mighty Mughal forces of Akbar in 1590's. Jehangir's wife NurJehan effectively wielded imperial power and was recognized as the real force behind the Mughal throne. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai was deputed as queen regent, because of her ability as a warrior and administrator. This reveals that in south India many women administered villages, towns, divisions, and heralded social and religious institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The Bhakti movement tried to restore women's status by questioning some forms of oppression. Mirabai, AkkaMahadevi, Rami Janabai and LalDed were some of the eminent female saint poets during this period. Their main aim was to advocate social justice and equality between men and women. After the Bhakti movement Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhs also preached the message of equality between men and women. He advocated that women were allowed to lead religious assemblies to perform, lead armies on the battle field, and to have equality in marriages etc. Other Sikh Guru's also preached against the discrimination against women.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans scholars observed that the Hindu women were "naturally chaste" and "more virtuous than any other women."<sup>9</sup> During the British rule, many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, JyotiraoPhuleetc fought for the upliftment of women. Raj Ram Mohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of the sati practice in 1829. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar crusade for the improvement in the condition of widows which led to the widow Re-Marriage Act of 1856. Rani Lakshmi Bai the queen of Jhansi a nationalist hero led the rebellion of 1857 against the British. Begum HazartMahal, the co-ruler of Awadh was another ruler who led the revolt of 1857. In which she refused the deals with the British and later retreated to Nepal. The Begums of Bhopal were also few notable female rulers during this period. They did not observe Purdah and were trained in Martial arts.

In 1917, the first women's delegation met the secretary of state to demand women's political rights which was supported by the National congress. The all Indian's women's educational conference was held in Pune in 1927. In 1929, the Child marriage restraint act was passed, stipulating fourteen as minimum age of marriage for a girl through the effort of Mohamed Ali Jinnah. Though, Mahatma Gandhi married at the age of 13, he later urged people to boycott child marriages and called upon the young man to marry the child widows.

Similarly, women played an important role in the India's independence struggle. Some of the famous freedom fighters noted in this period were, Dr. Annie Besant, PritilataWaddedar, VijayalakshmiPandit, Raj KumariAmritkaur, DurgabaiDeshmukh etc. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment of SubhasChandrs Bose's Indian National Army consisted entirely of women including captain Lakshmi sahgai. Sarojini Naidu, a poet and a freedom fighter was the first Indian women to become the president of Indian National congress and also the first to become the governor of a state of India.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century multi skilled, productive and innovative women entrepreneurs are inextricable for achieving sustained economic growth. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indication of the society state of development. Women to play a vital role in economic development of a nation should have an equal access to productive resource, opportunities and public services. Besides, the spirit of equal rights,

opportunities, progress, socialism and tremendous courage of women together make them to take bold steps in their progressive lines. These steps helped them to put in action as “Entrepreneurs” to show their talent through the “Enterprise” these multi-dimensional activities make them to unite and take part in full filling their responsibilities.

The impacts of industrialization, urbanization and globalization have influenced to change the educational pattern of Karnataka which in turn subjected to undergo a gradual change. This has made more number of women to come forward for seeking employment opportunities. Therefore women entrepreneurship is attaining transitional phase and it is generally believed that Entrepreneurs are born but not made. More recently this seems to be not correct because so many organizations under the influence of state and central government are providing enough support and appropriate environment to the women enterprise. As a result of all these organizations it confirms that Entrepreneurs are made but not born.

To uplift the status of women, the Indian constitution contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. The Government of India has always attached great importance to the protection and promotion of the human rights of women.

## **2. Analyzing the efforts made by government for improving the status of women.**

In 1971, Government of India showed a special concern over the rights and status of the women by setting up a Committee on the Status women in India (CSWI). It attempted to bring women into main stream by women empowerment; the main concern of the Government of India was to lay special thrust on women’s employment, making women self-reliant and economically independent. To fulfill these purposes, several women related policies incorporated in Government plan documents. The developments of women in India’s five year plan are as follows.<sup>10</sup>

### **First five year plan (1951-56)**

The concept of women development in the First five year plan was mainly welfare oriented as for as women’s issues are concerned. Women have the same opportunities as men for taking all kinds of work. The central social welfare board (CSWB) set up in 1953 undertook a number of welfare measures and introduced various women and children welfare programs through voluntary organizations.

### **Second five year plan (1956-61)**

In the second five year plan the broad objective was to establish a socialist pattern of society in a welfare state, besides giving priority to women’s education and child health services. Women’s were organized into

Mahila Mandals in rural areas to act as social points at the grass root levels for the development of women by facilitating convergence of health, nutrition and welfare measures.

### **Third & Fourth five year plan (1961-66 & 1969-74)**

The third & fourth five year plan accorded high priority to women's education as a major welfare strategy and concentrated mainly on the provision of services for maternal and child welfare or immunization of preschool children, supplementary diet for children and expectant, nursing mothers, health education, nutrition and family planning. It also provided training facilities for women.

### **Fifth five year plan (1974-1979)**

In the fifth five year plan there was shift in the approach to women issues from "welfare orientation" to "Developmental approach" with an objective of removal of poverty and attainment of self-reliance. This new approach aimed at an integration of welfare with developmental services. This plan coincided with the international women's decade and the submission of the report of the committee on the status of women in India (CSWI). The overall task of CSWI was to undertake a comprehensive examination relating to the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country and also about the problems relating to the advancement of women.

### **Sixth five year plan (1980-85)**

The sixth five year plan was a land mark in the history of women's development as it received recognition as one of the developmental sectors and was included in the sixth plan document as a separate chapter for the first time in the history of developmental planning. In this plan, varieties of programs were taken up to improve women's working condition and to raise the economic and social status. The generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper education and vocational training produced. As a result, Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) setting up of regional training center in India exclusively for women with the total intake capacity of about 11200 per annum. Similarly, in the rural development sector, the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) accorded priority to women heads of households. On the whole IRDP comprised about 7% of the total women beneficiaries.

A poverty alleviation scheme such as micro credit scheme was introduced to uplift through rural credit. A new scheme namely "Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas" (DWCRA) started in 1982 - 83. Here, women who were not in a position to take advantage of schemes under IRDP were organized into homogenous group of the capacity 15-20 and were trained effectively. This scheme proved effectively and became popular and produced 30,000 women trained during two year period (1983-85). A number of technology demonstration-cum-training Centre at selected focal points all over the country were set up by National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) to provide expertise and resources to women

entrepreneurs in their economic enterprise. A number of schemes were selected in the social welfare sectors to benefit the destitute and needy women. .

### **Seventh five year plan (1985-1990)**

In the seventh five year plan (1985-1990), the developmental programs for women's continued with the major objectives of raising economic and social status and to bring them in to the main stream of National Development. A significant step in this direction was to identify /promote the beneficiary oriented programs for women in different developmental sectors which extend direct benefit to women. Special attention was given to agriculture and allied sectors for improving existing skills of women and imparting to them new skills under the programs of farmers training. IRDP, NREP (National Rural Employment Programs), TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth in Self –Employment) and other such programs were functional component of women beneficiaries. In the field of science and technology, training and retraining was ensured, the beneficiary oriented programs in the various sectors of development were suitably modified or re-oriented, to avail the due share of benefits from such programs.

### **Eighth Five year plan (1992-97)**

The eighth Five year plan (1992-97) recorded thirty percent reservation for women at all levels of Government. It focused on monitoring the flow of benefits to women from other developmental sectors to enable women to function as equal partners in the development process. A shift was made from process of “development” to “empowerment” to make women self-reliant and economically independent.

### **Ninth five year plan (1997-2002)**

The ninth five year plan (1997-2002) gave information about the schemes exclusively meant for women. This commitment was noteworthy because it was the first time the plan devoted a full chapter on women's empowerment. Some of the special features of this commitment were finalization and adoption of national policies for the empowerment of women. This empowerment of women became one of the main primary objectives of ninth plan. The vocational training was provided in various fields to improve their skills and to enhance their capacity to earn more. Productive opportunities were created for women through Women self-help Groups and associations.

### **Tenth five year plan (2002-2007)**

The tenth five year plan (2002-2007) aims at empowering women through the transfer of control of social infrastructure in the public sphere to women's group as a strategy of plan. The tenth plan called for the three pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment, and providing gender justice to create an environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discriminations against them and advanced gender equality goals. It also recognizes the need for a

comprehensive credit policy to increase women's access to credit for the establishment of new micro-credit mechanisms or micro-financial institutions or strengthening existing ones.

### **Eleventh five year plan (2007-2012)**

Eleventh five year plan (2007-2012) has laid great emphasis on removing gender disparity and also seek to reduce disparities across regions and communities by ensuring access to basic physical infrastructure as well as health and education service to all. It also recognize gender as a cross cutting thing across all sectors and commit to respect and promote the rights of the common person. A multi-pronged approach is to be adopted to motivate the women to pursue entrepreneurial activities. Hence, efforts should be made to raise the level of women entrepreneurs in small scale industries, social activists, NGO's Government agencies and corporate sector must play an active role in the transformation of women and to explore entrepreneurial opportunities in small scale industries.

### **Conclusion:-**

Entrepreneurship seems to be ideal for women seeking participation in the country's economic development because they are closely linked to social, cultural, religious and psychological variables and these changes seem to have become acceptable norms in the context of women at work. Hence more and more women are participating in the economic development to enhance their socio economic status in the society.

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