



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Gender Inequality and Public Action in India

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### Abstract

The term gender is usually used to indicate the differences between sexes. Often it is merely a synonym for women. Of late the social scientists use the term gender in a broader perspective in order to pinpoint the social, political and economic obstacles which people undergo on the basis of sex discrimination. These obstacles form the basis of discrimination based on gender. Gender issues are nowadays an integral part of the development process.

In our Indian society, we find how a parental preference for son usually leads to discrimination against women. Women and men do not have the same access to health care and nutritious food. Women when ill are less likely to be taken to the hospital than men. Women are less likely to be given adequate supplies of food; it being because of oppression, male-based traditional attitude, or because of inherited social custom and tradition that women should take care of all the members of the family excepting used to meet household needs, whereas men tend to retain a considerable portion of their income for personal spending.

The consequences of these types of unequal treatments are bound to happen in a rather bitter way. If women were treated in the same way as men were treated, there would be so many millions of women alive today in our society. In fact, the women receive a meagre amount of recognition; female children receive less attention.

In the above backdrop, the present paper highlights the poverty-gender and employment-gender nexus in India after presenting at the outset the positions and status of women in both developed and developing countries in Section II and III respectively. Section IV describes the present position and status of women and the approach of the Government of India to abolish gender inequality in this context is discussed in Section V. Section VI is the concluding observations.

**Keywords:** FLFPR, Gender inequality, HDR, Labour market, Public action, Sex discrimination, Women

Gender disparities remain among the most persistent forms of inequality across all countries. Given that these disadvantages affect half the world's people, gender inequality is arguably one of the greatest barriers to human development. All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, in education, at home and in the labour market—with negative repercussions for their freedoms.

UNDP 2019

## 1 Introduction

The term gender is usually used to indicate the differences between sexes. Often it is merely a synonym for women. Of late the social scientists use the term gender in a broader perspective in order to pinpoint the social, political and economic obstacles which people undergo on the basis of sex discrimination. These obstacles form the basis of discrimination based on gender. Gender issues are nowadays an integral part of the development process.

The Human Development Report's Gender Inequality Index—a measure of women's empowerment in health, education and economic status—shows that overall progress in gender inequality has been slowing in recent years (UNDP, 2019). These inequalities in human development are a roadblock to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In our Indian society, we find how a parental preference for son usually leads to discrimination against women. Women and men do not have the same access to health care and nutritious food. Women when ill are less likely to be taken to the hospital than men. Women are less likely to be given adequate supplies of food; it being because of oppression, male-based traditional attitude, or because of inherited social custom and tradition that women should take care of all the members of the family excepting used to meet household needs, whereas men tend to retain a considerable portion of their income for personal spending.

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One incident that can be recalled here, even true to this day, is that in the fall of 1928, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), a major innovative woman novelist of the twentieth century, was invited to deliver two lectures on the subject of women and fiction. These lectures were published in the following year under the title *A Room of One's Own*, which refers to Woolf's observation that having a private room in which to think and write is a basic requirement for producing literature, a requirement that, along with economic independence few women in history had ever enjoyed. Raising the question of why women have had not succeeded, Woolf

describes the poverty, social pressures, family demands and lack of education that tended to prevent women from writing.

In what follows is that the wave of modernization is also not actually benefiting women, denying them actual access to land, training, education and technology. Most of the members of the family see women as secondary earners and press to concentrate their roles as mere housewives. Even the development programmes ignored and excluded women. But research shows that women use what little they have to good effect and invest more of their income in their children's onward marching.

Gender inequality is now a problem. Women face even a gendered labour market with women's jobs (and pay levels) at the lower end of the job hierarchy; women are absent from the corridors of power (whether in politics, religion or finance). Using the concept of gender (the socially acquired notions of masculinity and femininity) and gender relations (the socially constructed form of relations between men and women), we can analyze how development strategies reshape these power relations and how also economic and social change, whether planned or unplanned, often gives greater opportunities to one gender, or we may show how the development of market economy has shifted the balance sharply in men's favour, market economy not helping to spread egalitarian values nor changing the man-based traditional attitudes. We have before us an influential early study prepared for the Government of India's presentation to the 1975 UN Women's Conference where scholars who collected data for the study, were shocked to find how large segments of the female population had been pushed into even greater poverty, while middle class and educated women had actually benefited.

In the above backdrop, the present paper highlights the poverty-gender and employment-gender nexus in India after presenting at the outset the positions and status of women in both Developed and Developing Countries in Section I and II respectively and the approach of the Government of India to abolish gender inequality in this context is discussed in Section IV.

## **II. The Position and Status of Women in Developed Countries**

Gender inequality is intrinsically linked to human development, and it exhibits the same dynamics of convergence in basic capabilities and divergence in enhanced capabilities. Overall, it is still the case—as Martha Nussbaum has pointed out—that “women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life.” This is evident in the Gender Inequality Index and its components—reflecting gaps in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.

Women of the developed countries are entering in the labour market at a large number. But more women at work does not necessarily imply a more egalitarian distribution of pay between men and women. In fact, wage differentials between men and women are wider in countries with the largest female employment rates. For instance, the United States displays a significant larger gender wage gap than Europe does, but has a female employment rate up to 10 per cent points higher than the EU average. Similarly, within the European Union, countries with the greatest labour market participation of women display the greatest differentials in average pay between men and women. In what follows, the employment gap is narrowing down just as the wage gap is expanding. A key explanation is that a greater spread in wages contributes to the increase in the participation of women. Besides, on average, men have more work experience and experience is rewarded with higher pay. Moreover may women typically enter the labour market in low-skill occupations, which can survive if they can pay low wages?

Economic evidence and simulation exercise by some researchers for Italy and Norway suggest that minimum guaranteed income scheme, a negative income tax or workfare systems, may contribute to increasing female labour supply. This is so because there is evidence that if a way is found to increase two incomes from work, more women will want to come into the labour market and seek employment. Therefore such policy instruments might simultaneously contribute to a higher female employment, a lower gender gap and a more equal income distribution, partly offsetting the persistently larger gender wage gaps.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, only 18 per cent of American women were part of the labour force. By the year 2001, this fraction had reached 61 per cent. Now it is 65 per cent. This trend has been particularly prominent for women. The labour force participation rate of married women rose from 5 per cent in 1900 to about 65 per cent in 2005 and 70 percent in 2020. There are few plausible explanations for this change. The improvement in working conditions in the market place, both in terms of status and in terms of hours of work, makes it more attractive for women to go out to seek work. Also, the availability of contraceptive methods allows women to plan their fertility and the timing of births, making it easier for them to plan a career. Other favourable developments are the introduction of new technologies that's have made it possible for firms to create more female-friendly job besides clerical work and sales and changes in the wage structure that have favoured women. Finally the rise in the female employment rate is also explained in terms of the change in society's attitudes towards the role that women should play in the home and in the market place. Recent research has shown that in no case, it can be said that the slowdown of married women's earnings growth in the 1980s, 1990s and beyond cannot explain the increase in married women's labour force participation. But if we evaluate the gender wage gap in the US, we observe a steady and rapid increase in the relative earnings of women starting in the 1980. By 2006, women's earning are increasing at a rapid rate. New groups of women with higher educational levels started entering the labour market. Over the last two decades and more women also shifted to higher-paying occupations.

This relative improvement in the characteristics of the female labour force contributed to the narrowing of the gender wage gap. Studies by Blau and Kahn (1997) and O'Neel and Polacheck (1993) show that both the increase in the rate of return to labour market experience and the increase in the actual experience of women can explain between one-third and a half of the drop in the gender gap. The cross-country evidence on the gender wage gap also articulates on the other hand that women's hourly earnings are lower than men's in all the countries of Europe as well as in America and there is a significant differential in the pay of men and women remain in European countries, although the wage gap is not as large as in America.

### **III. Gender and Development in Developing Countries**

Almost in all societies, whether developed, developing or less developed, are characterized in varying degrees by gender inequality and the exploitation of women. IMF and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have disregarded the subsidiary role of women. These programmes in fact reinforce male-bias and make worse the socio-economic norms confronting the LDC women.

It is a fact that the positions and status of LDC women vary widely as a result of diverse cultural values, historical factors, levels of economic development, and types of government and governance. Moreover, we often find that women in the same society may also occupy vastly different positions depending on their social class and ethnicity. In spite of that, we may identify some general characteristics of the position and status of women in LDCs:

- In the household sector, women spend much of their time than men on the average, on subsistence work with no pay involving child care, food production and preparation, health care and children's education. Time Use Survey, 2019 showed females spending disproportionately large time on unpaid domestic and care-giving services to household members compared to their male counterparts. This explains the reason for the relatively low level of female LFPR in India. There is a need to promote non-discriminatory practices at the workplace like pay and career progression, improve work incentives, including other medical and social security benefits for female workers.
- In the informal sector, women's work is largely unaffected by government regulations and standards. About three-fourths of those in the informal sector are service providers. Informal sector earnings on the average are well below those of the formal sector.
- In the formal sector, women are more concentrated in the lower skilled, lower wage occupations and they very often receive lower salaries than men for doing the same work.
- Compared with men, women are more important in agricultural labour, and less important in industry. In Africa, for example, women produce 90 per cent of the food, but they are less important in the production of export crops.
- In LDC societies, women engaged in household sectors being the sole breadwinners are among the poorest groups (Frances Stewart 1992).

Since World Bank policy prescriptions are based on macro-economic strands, they are virtually unaware to the effect of its structural policies on women's work. Women's unpaid subsistence work in the household goes beyond the purview in Bank's production statistics, Bank's cutback policy in governments spending usually leads to decreases in the provision of public goods. Consequently, much of the social burden shifts to the household sector where women have most of the responsibility.

World Bank and IMF policy prescriptions that raise the cost of basic foodstuffs simply add to the problems of LDC women. Because of the higher food costs, women must have to use cheaper foods that take long time to prepare. Whereas the World Bank views cutbacks in government spending and subsidies as an indication of increased efficiency, the costs are simply being shifted from the paid to the unpaid economy, where women do most of the work.

Under SAPs women have fared poorly as members of the formal and informal labour force, though their participation in the labour market as a proportion of the total labour force has increased in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, farmers are paid higher prices to encourage them to produce more crops for the export market.

Cash crops are men's crops, whereas subsistence food crops are mainly women's crops. Besides, women do not benefit from the increased prices because men often keep most of their earnings for their own use (Elson, 1991).

Critics thus agree that SAPs affect LDC women adversely in their multiple roles as mothers, household managers, community traders and workers in the formal and informal sectors.

Gender inequalities and unequal power relations skew the development process. In many developing countries women's opportunities for gainful forms of employment are limited to subsistence farming—often without full land ownership rights or access to credit and technology which could alter production relations and



female bargaining power. In many societies, women are confined either to secluded forms of home-based production that yield low returns, or to marginal jobs in the informal economy where income is exceptionally low and working conditions are poor. In addition, women typically have to endure the 'double burden' of employment and domestic work—the latter includes housework, preparing meals, fetching water and wood, and caring for children—amongst many other tasks. Indeed, worldwide, women tend to work more hours than men when domestic work is included.

A range of studies over the last four decades have shown that households do not automatically pool their resources, and that who earns and controls income can make a major difference to household well-being. Numerous empirical studies examining the relationship between women's market work, infant feeding practices, and child nutrition indicate that the children of mothers with higher incomes and more economic power are better nourished. In the gold mining industry in Africa for example an increase in women's wage-earning opportunities is associated with increased access to healthcare, the halving of infant mortality rates—especially for girls—and a reduction in the acceptance of domestic violence by 24 per cent.

The distribution of benefits and burdens becomes more equitable when women have a stronger voice and more access to education and employment. Improving women's economic opportunities can prove a highly effective way to reduce poverty and improve women's relative position and that of their children. Overall household well-being is likely to be improved by ensuring that more women are enrolled in education, can read, write, and count, and have appropriate skills for jobs. Steps to tackle restrictive cultural norms and laws regarding women's education, participation in the labour force, ownership of land and other assets, inheritance rights, marriage, and freedom to participate in society make important contributions in this regard.

Many of these initiatives are likely to translate into specific sector priorities and policies—for example vocational training, access to cheap transport, and access to saving and credit markets.

Women are disadvantaged in the credit market in the developing countries as they typically have no collateral and smaller informal networks, largely due to their relative confinement to the domestic sphere. Innovative microfinance schemes have sought to overcome this by providing flexible loans on favourable terms, often requiring no collateral or with zero interest, for investment in small-scale productive activities—such as rearing chickens or a goat. The most well-known example is the Grameen Bank, which has been providing finance to poor Bangladeshis since the late 1970s. By 2016 cumulative disbursement of loans exceeded \$16 billion and the bank had provided loans to over 7 million individuals, 97 per cent of whom are women (Goldin, 2016:60). In fact, of late, financial inclusion remains high on public policy agendas in many developing countries, and banks are increasingly considering low-income families and their income generating activities as interesting market opportunities. In some countries the microfinance markets are getting integrated into regular bank markets and public regulation, while at the same time the social aspects of microfinance continues to be debated. Somewhere microfinance strategy does not run well because of the powerful dominance of neo-liberal supremacy. The Covid -19 crisis is putting the entire banking industry under tremendous pressure. Even more so for the microfinance industry serving clients with a need for daily income. Another area of interest is the liability structure where international impact investors account for a sizable share of microfinance funding.

The participation of women in the workplace together with gender differences in pay, promotion, and business leadership are important aspects of empowerment. Political representation and gender disparities in healthcare and education (often reflecting 'boy preference' in many parts of the world) are also key indicators of social progress. Since the introduction of the MDGs in 1990, women in many countries have made progress

towards parity with men, although much more still needs to be done. Significant progress has been made in terms of tackling female infant mortality and enabling young girls to attend school, although gross disparities between men and women persist across the board. Despite some notable progress, practices which fundamentally constrain women, among the worst of which is female genital mutilation, which affects at least 125 million women in over twenty-nine countries, continue to pose a major development challenge.

Less progress has been made in terms of women's employment in the labour market—especially in Asia where ground has been lost over the last twenty-five years. This may have far reaching implications beyond our concern with fairness and gender justice. A recent speculative study suggests that advancing gender equality in the workplace could add as much as \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 (assuming every country in the world could match the performance of its fastest improving neighbour in terms of progress towards gender equality). While the advanced economies have the most to gain, developing countries and regions could expect to benefit from significant increases in income by 2025 including India (\$0.7 trillion or 11% of GDP), Latin America (\$1.1 trillion or 14 per cent of GDP), China (\$2.5 trillion or 12 per cent of GDP), sub-Saharan Africa (\$0.3 trillion or 12 per cent of GDP), and the Middle East and North Africa (\$0.6 trillion or 11 per cent of GDP) (amongst other countries and regions). This is a hope but the horrifying picture is also there. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa 1 in every 180 women giving birth dies (more than 20 times the rate in developed countries), and adult women are less educated, have less access to labour markets than men in most regions and lack access to political power (UNDP, 2019).

Knowing that education, health and nutrition, and gender equity—amongst other things—are important for development is only the start. Developing policies to tackle these issues is a major challenge. In many countries, for example, the failure of education systems relates to a lack of quality rather than quantity of resources spent. In India case studies have catalogued a number of issues including poorly trained and qualified teachers, mindless and repetitive learning experiences, lack of books and learning material, poor accountability of teachers and unions, school days without formal activities, and high rates of absenteeism amongst staff and students. Moreover, improving outcomes is more complex than finding money for school fees or budgets for teachers. Issues such as having appropriate clothes for the walk to school or the availability of single-sex toilets at school can play a decisive role, especially for girls.

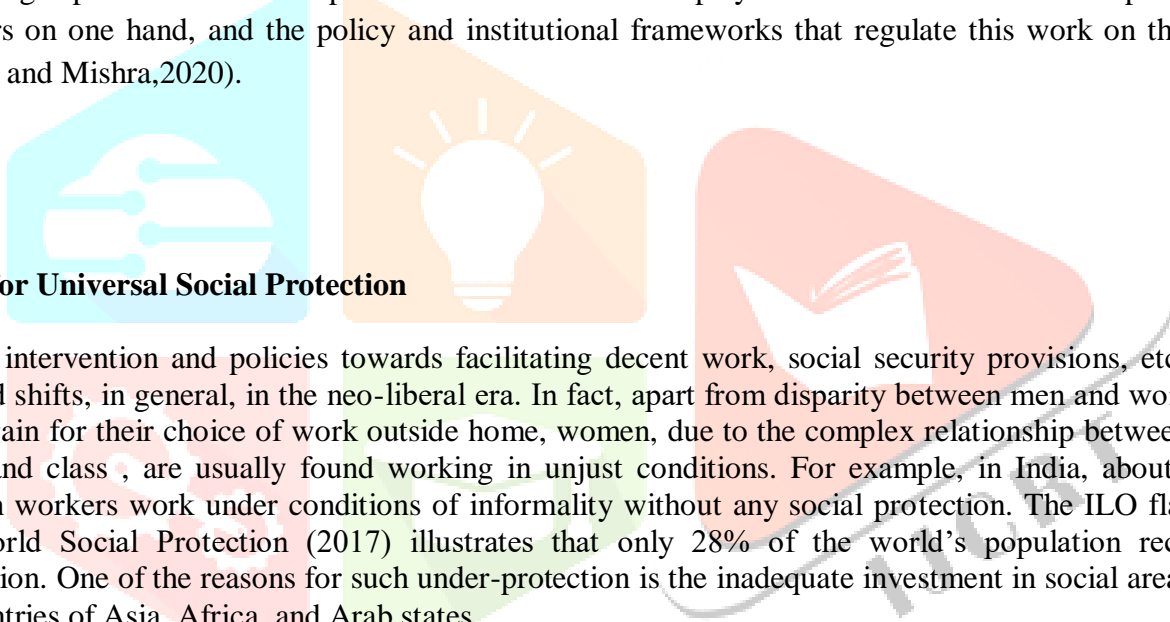
#### **IV. Position and Status of Women in India**

The increasing vulnerable situations of India's women, particularly of its women's workers is confirmed by the Global Gender gap Report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2017. The report looks at the four components: economic participation, educational attainment, health status, and political empowerment. In three of the four indicators, India ranks in the bottom half of the table. For example, in terms of economic empowerment of women, India ranked 139 out of 144 countries, and in terms of health and survival it ranked 141 out of 144 countries. Even in educational attainment, a factor hyped by the government as a major achievement, the country only ranked 112 out of 144 countries. The only indicator where it ranked in the top-20 was political empowerment. Because of this, the overall position of India improved slightly, but the country still ranks a poor as far as gender gap was concerned ( *World Economic Forum* 2017).

## Employment Trend: A Paint of Depressing Picture of Employment Prospects for Women

There has been a declining trend in female labour force participation rates (FLFPR) since the 1980s due to changes in the overall macroeconomic policy regime from the dirigiste to the neo-liberalization. The structural changes brought about in the latter era have led to a significant decline in the female employment, and contributed to the already overwhelming informality which have impacted the world of Indian women's work even more adversely. FLFPR had declined from 23.7% in 1993-94 to 18.1 % in 2011-12 for the rural areas and it had been stagnant at around 13-14% in the urban areas during the same period. From the Indian data one can easily show that that women are highly concentrated and overrepresented in casual work and unpaid self-employment ( Papola 2013). Thus, despite the recognition of gender equality in law, the progress towards gender equality as outcomes in the labour market remains quite insignificant. Besides, there exists a whole range of dense, diverse and often overlapping categories of exclusions of women, particularly from the marginalized groups, from just condition of work.

From the discussion, it is quite evident that the question of feminization of work is a complex one, and can only be grasped within the complex framework of the interplay between different forms of paid and unpaid workers on one hand, and the policy and institutional frameworks that regulate this work on the other (Jha, Kumar and Mishra,2020).



### Need for Universal Social Protection

Public intervention and policies towards facilitating decent work, social security provisions, etc., have seen marked shifts, in general, in the neo-liberal era. In fact, apart from disparity between men and women's ability to bargain for their choice of work outside home, women, due to the complex relationship between patriarchy, caste and class , are usually found working in unjust conditions. For example, in India, about 93% of the women workers work under conditions of informality without any social protection. The ILO flagship report on World Social Protection (2017) illustrates that only 28% of the world's population receives social protection. One of the reasons for such under-protection is the inadequate investment in social areas, especially in countries of Asia, Africa, and Arab states.

India has only ratified Convention 118 for providing maternity benefits, where about 41% of the mothers are said to be covered by maternity benefits. But in overall terms, only 19% of the population of the country is covered by at least one scheme of social protection. Along with this, the share of public expenditure on social security remained a meager 0.53% of the total expenditure and 0.07% of the GDP ( Centre of Budget Governance and Accountability 2018).

Women still account for the smallest percentage of employees in the formal public and private sector workforce. The majority of formal sector women workers in India are concentrated unskilled and low-paid work in the industrial and service sector. By far the majority of formal sector employment is urban-based. In India, women's formal sector employment has increased from 12 per cent in 1981 to just over 15 per cent in 1995 (Gol 1998). Within the Indian formal sector, 57 per cent of women workers are employed in community, social and personal services, 11 per cent in agriculture, 18 per cent in manufacturing, 5 per cent in finance, in service, real estate and business services and 4 per cent in the transport and communications sector. Here is a pen picture of employment status by gender in India.



**Table 1: Distribution by rural-urban sector 1993-94 (%)**

	Self employed	Regular employees	Casual labour
All India Male	53.7	16.7	29.6
All India Female	56.8	6.2	37
Rural Male	57.9	8.3	33.8
Rural Female	58.5	2.8	38.7
Urban Male	41.7	42.1	16.2
Urban Female	45.4	28.0	26

Source: *Economic Survey, GoI, 2005-2006.*

One of the very disturbing features of the growth pattern in the post-liberalization period is very low employment generating potential of growth in the secondary and tertiary sectors. The result is increase in the concentration of the female workforce in agriculture and consequent increase in poverty among female workers as well as persistent deterioration of relative productivity and income of workers engaged in the primary sectors. Moreover, the emergence of rural non-farm sectors as important provider of female employment in rural areas during 1987-88 was one of the important findings of the 45<sup>th</sup> round of the NSS. But a serious development was the reversal of the trend during the 1990s and beyond. By 2006, the share of female workers in the primary sector has increased to a greater extent. In view of the above there is a need to think about new policy initiatives.

Recent all-India survey, the 60<sup>th</sup> round of NSSO, on the situation of employment and unemployment conducted in January to June, 2004 points out the large rural-urban and male-female divide in employment and wages. In respect of current daily status of unemployment, the rate appears to be larger in rural areas (Table 2).

## V. Gender Inequality and the Public Action in India

It is an irony that women's contribution to the economy has remained invisible to policy makers and even scholars. History is the evidence to the fact that in spite of the active participation of the women in the economy, due to pervasive gender ideologies, women's identity as workers has always been less established, though women enter the labour market as bearer of gender identity, taking wages less than male wages. In the context of present day job opportunities, we can see a direct relationship with women as secondary earner and their vulnerability to poverty. Recent empirical analyses on the effects of the contemporary trade-induced changes in the economy suggest that consequences of trade liberalization for men and women can be looked at in terms of gender patterns of rights to resources, female labour participation rates and educational levels and gaps by gender etc.

**Table 2: Unemployment Rates**

All India

Status	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Usual-principal status	24	22	23	46	89	53
Current weekly status	47	45	46	57	90	64
Current daily status	90	93	91	81	117	88

*\*Unemployment rates (number of persons {or person days} unemployed per 1000 persons {or person days})*

*Source: NSSO's 60<sup>th</sup> Round Survey on Employment and Unemployment, quoted in Economic Survey, Government of India, 2005-06.*

We have before us three documents like, a) Report of the Task Force on Employment Opportunities, b) Report of the Steering Committee on labour and Employment for the Tenth Five Year Plan, c) Report of the Special Group in Ten Million Employment Opportunities per year over the Tenth Plan Period. Even when it is clear that women and men have different chances of being employed in different sectors and with respect to the job contract, the Task Force does not consider these differences important for outlining strategies. It only mentions the increasing incidence of unemployment, for example, but fail to highlight that percentage of unemployment among women is much higher as compared to men in both rural and urban areas. In rural India, of late only 26% women as compared to nearly 51% men were educated. The Task Force highlights the poor skill set of women, but does not address the reasons behind poor skill development.

In recent years high percentage of women participate in Employment Assurance Scheme and the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana operating in rural areas. This is the findings of working group on Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme. That these programmes have a considerable role in providing supplementary employment, has not been recognized by the Task Force. The GDP growth-based employment generation strategy that the Task Force advocates is not going to help the existing inequalities in the labour market.

Report of the Steering Committee shows that few employers follow social security laws, such as Workers' Compensation Act, 1923, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Payments of Gratuity Act, 1972 and Minimum Wage Act, 1948. But the Steering Committee does not address the reasons for the failure of compliance to these laws.

Further, in India, the gender equality consciousness is explicitly noticed right from the constitution and our constitution has accorded full equality for women to protect the interest of the women. The Five-Year Plan so far introduced have emphasized on the welfare and nutrition for women and children and the increase of women's share in the labour force. It is also true that right from the second Five-Year Plan upto Niti Aayog, planners and policy makers only had focused on the small, modern sector of the economy and had left the major productive activities and workers in the unchanged unorganized sector, although a number of schemes have already been introduced to improve the condition of women by removing obstacle they face so that they can enjoy their due rights and new opportunities. Various social legislations such as Anti-dowry Act, Child Marriage Restraint Act, Indian Succession Act, Equal Remuneration Act have been enacted to protect the women from gender bias operating against their interest. Moreover, the Plantation Act, 1957, Mines Act 1952, Contract Labour Act 1970 etc. are an attempt to look into the poverty of women. A number of High Powered Committees and Commissions have been appointed to review the progress of schemes and legislations adopted for women and provide guidance for future progress. These are the attempts in the positive direction.

The approach of the government here to abolish gender inequality has been so far one of the ad hoc basis leading to marginal benefits only. Marginal benefits will not add to positive results. Women's needs have not been in commensurate with official programmes. Governmental elementary machinery has been found to be very weak, indifferent and ineffective to reach the women; it is now well accepted that the poorest families are most dependent on women's earnings (Sen, 1992). Yet despite this which suggests that women play a crucial role in eradicating poverty of the country's nearly 60 million households living below the poverty line, the Government invests far less in women workers in terms of education, health, productive assets compared to

male workers. At present barely 6% of the economically active women are in the formal sector. Majority of the workers are in the informal sector and any plan to improve women's economic conditions will have to focus in this area.

## VI. Conclusion

To sum up, despite a much greater level of overall awareness on gender issues and despite the solid body of research and intervention experience that now exist, policy and programmes continue to show no or very limited concerns with gender equity. This is evident in the analysis of the labour policy documents. Furthermore, economic growth has strong direct poverty and inequality reducing effects automatically. Sustained economic growth really trickles down. Economic growth has a far greater impact on poverty alleviation than inequality. Therefore, given India's stage of development, India must continue to focus on economic growth to lift the poor out of poverty by expanding the overall pie. Aided by a good system of equal land ownership reforms, social development programs in rural areas since 2000 (including universal compulsory education up to grade 9), rural medical cooperative system, social pension system for rural residents, and a minimum living allowance scheme) and targeted poverty reduction programs, in place nationally since 1986. China is now on road to end extreme poverty by 2030.

The frictions and rigidities in the Indian economy can make these processes less effective. So But in Indian context, a strategy based on solely on growth may overlook many issues that the paper has attempted to bring out. The road to gender equality is not a linear one. Blue print for effective implementation needs to be evolved and efforts must be made to address the constraints faced by the women in the labour market. It is, therefore, imperative that the development process must include gender equality as an internal component of the broader strategies.

Last but not the least, development thinking regarding gender and development has come a long way, but onto it new and innovative thoughts are required if we are to successfully address the rapidly emerging new development challenges.

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