

## **Status of Women in India in the Context of Inclusive Growth**

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**Abstract:** *Women empowerment and the movement towards gender equality is a modern phenomenon that continues to develop around the world. To be precise, women empowerment refers to a process of empowering women with all the denied aspects of life. Reforms undertaken in the early 1990s have made India one of the world's fastest growing economies. However, it is interesting to note that this economic growth had bypassed the poor and vulnerable, especially, women. In recognition of this, the Planning Commission had made inclusive growth an explicit goal in the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 – 2012). The inclusive approach has been extended in the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017), which lays emphasis not merely on economic development but on inclusive growth to bring more poor and marginalized citizens including women under its ambit. The concept of inclusive growth generally means that everyone is included in the growth process. This paper examines the status of women and the issues of their empowerment in India in the context of inclusive growth. The results show that in spite of claim of 'gender inclusive growth' by the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), the mass of Indian women have been continuously bypassed and marginalised in the growth process.*

**Keywords -** *Inclusive growth, Status of women, Women empowerment.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Women's empowerment is a modern phenomenon which has been gaining attention around the world in recent years. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 initiated a move to focus on women's empowerment. In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals furthered the campaign for women's rights in areas such as education, health, and poverty. Reforms undertaken in the early 1990s have made India one of the world's fastest growing economies. But the economic growth that had taken place so far, bypassed the poor and vulnerable particularly women. However, it is essential for any country that each section of society should contribute to the economic growth and, at the same time, the benefits of the growth should reach to all sections of the society. In recognition of this, the Planning Commission had made 'inclusive growth' an explicit goal in the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 – 2012). The inclusive approach has been extended in the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017), which lays emphasis not merely on economic development but on inclusive growth to bring more poor and marginalized citizens under its ambit. The present study aims to examine the status of women in India and the issues of their empowerment in the era of inclusive growth. The study is based mainly on secondary data collected from different sources, such as, Census of India, National Sample Survey (NSS), Sample Registration System (SRS), National Statistical Organisation (NSO), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and books and journals.

### **II. Defining The Concepts Of Women Empowerment And Inclusive Growth**

It is difficult to precisely define the term 'women's empowerment' as 'empowerment' has multiple, interrelated and interdependent dimensions - economic, social, cultural and political. Most current definitions of empowerment in the development literature draw upon Amartya Sen's articulation of "Development as Freedom" (1999) where development is about expanding people's choices. For example, Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". Changes in the ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of changes in three inter-related dimensions which make up choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency which is at the heart of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices (Kabeer, 2001). The World Development Report 2012 has offered a broader notion of agency which includes control over resources, decision-making, freedom of movement, freedom from the risk of violence and a voice and influence in collective decision-making processes.

The UN (2001) has defined women's empowerment in terms of five components: "women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally".

The most common indicators of women’s empowerment measure capabilities, education and health in particular, and control over economic and political resources and decision-making (Desai, 2010). Malhotra et al. (2002) suggest expanding empowerment to include six dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, family/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Each of these dimensions is complex with various sub dimensions. For example, the economic dimension would include labour force participation, wage differential, and sex segregation among others. They also identify three levels for measuring empowerment, household, community and broader areas. Grown (2008) defines three domains of empowerment: the capabilities domain, which evaluates knowledge and health factors through indicators of education, health, and nutrition; the access to resources and opportunities domain, which primarily refers to access to political decision making and economic assets; and the security domain, which considers violence and conflict matters.

Coming to the concept of inclusive growth, the term ‘inclusive growth’ generally means a growth which ensures opportunities for all sections of the population, with a special emphasis on the poor, particularly women and young people, who are most likely to be marginalised. In other words, growth is inclusive when it creates economic opportunities along with ensuring equal access to them.

The Commission on Growth and Development of the World Bank defines inclusiveness as a concept that encompasses equity, equality of opportunity, and protection in market and employment transitions. Here we emphasize the idea of equality of opportunity in terms of access to markets, resources, and unbiased regulatory environment for businesses and individuals (Commission on Growth and Development, 2008).

The inclusive growth approach takes a longer term perspective as the focus is on productive employment rather than on direct income redistribution as a means of increasing incomes for excluded groups. While income distribution schemes can allow people to benefit from economic growth in the short run, inclusive growth allows people to contribute to and benefit from economic growth (Ianchovichina and Lundstrom, 2009; Chakrabarty, 2010).

Thus, “inclusive growth refers both to the pace and pattern of growth. Rapid pace of growth is unquestionably necessary for substantial poverty reduction, but for this growth to be sustainable in the long run, it should be broad-based across sectors, and inclusive of the large part of the country’s labour force” (Ianchovichina and Lundstrom, 2009).

### **III. Status Of Women In India In The Era Of Inclusive Growth**

The 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan ‘Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth’ aimed to attain ‘gender inclusive growth’ in terms of benefits flowing through more employment and income to women who have been bypassed by higher rates of economic growth witnessed in recent years. The inclusive approach has been extended in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan also. Now let us see the status of women in India in the age of inclusive growth in terms of some key constituents which ensure women’s empowerment such as sex ratio, education, health, economic participation, participation in decision making and the incidence of violence against women.

#### **3.1 Sex Ratio**

The preference for male child is so strong in our society that it is manifested as limiting the birth and survival of girls. Thus, although the sex ratio has increased from 933 in 2001 to 943 in 2011, there has been a continuous decline in the sex ratio for the population age 0-6, from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and, further, to 918 in 2011 (Census of India).

#### **3.2 Education**

In India, male literacy has always been higher than female literacy. As shown in Table-1, although the gender differential in literacy has declined over time, the differential remains high in both rural as well as urban areas. Female literacy is still far below of male literacy and a vast section of the rural female is still illiterate.

**Table-1: Literacy Rates**

Literacy Rate	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Rural	71.4	46.7	59.4	78.6	58.7	67.8
Urban	86.7	73.2	80.3	89.7	79.9	84.1
(Rural+Urban)	75.3	53.7	64.8	82.1	65.5	74.0

Source: Census of India

Besides, female drop-out rates are still very high at all levels of education. The number of girls going to school in rural areas is abysmally low. Moreover, majority of the girls who join the school drop out by the age of puberty to get married.

### 3.3 Health

Lack of access of women to proper information and health-care facilities as well as pre-age marriages have translated into high infant mortality rates (IMR), maternal mortality rates (MMR), reproductive diseases and a greater incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. The female IMR has been higher than male IMR. Thus, the female IMR was 42 compared with the male IMR of 39 in 2013 (SRS Bulletin, 2014). Although MMR has gone down, it is still higher. The MMR was 178 in 2010-12 (Women and Men in India, 2014).

### 3.4 Economic Participation

Economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Women's economic empowerment calls for inter-alia gainful and secure employment opportunities. Table-2 shows that female work participation rate is very low and less than half that of male. Further, there has not been any improvement in female work participation rate over the years; rather it has decreased marginally from 25.6% in 2001 to 25.5% in 2011. The important thing to be noted in Table 1.2 is that more than 40% of the women workers are still in the category of marginal workers. Although the percentage of female marginal workers decreased slightly from 42.7% in 2001 to 40.4% in 2011 and that of male increased from 12.7% in 2001 to 17.7% in 2011, however, the proportion of female marginal workers is still more than double than that of male.

**Table-2: Work Participation Rate and Types of Workers (in %)**

Category	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Work Participation Rate	51.7	25.6	39.1	53.3	25.5	39.8
Main Workers	87.3	57.3	77.8	82.3	59.6	75.2
Marginal Workers	12.7	42.7	22.2	17.7	40.4	24.8

Source: Census of India

Most of the women workers in India are outside the organized sector. A total of 20.5% women were employed in the organized sector in 2011 with 18.1% working in the public sector and 24.3% in the private (Women and Men in India, 2014). Women employment is the highest in the traditional low wage activities like agriculture and related activities. Agriculture in India is increasingly becoming a female activity. Most of the women work in agricultural sector either as workers in household farms or as wage workers.

**Table-3: Percentage of Workers by Categories of Workers**

Category of Workers	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Cultivators	31.1	32.9	31.6	24.9	24.0	24.7
Agricultural Labourers	20.8	38.9	26.5	24.9	41.1	30.0
Household Industry Workers	3.2	6.46	4.2	2.9	5.7	3.8
Other Workers	44.9	21.7	37.6	47.2	29.2	41.6

Source: Census of India

Thus, Table-3 shows that female agricultural labourers as percentage of total female workers have been on the rise and very much higher than men. Besides, the percentage of female in regular wage/salaried employment has been much lower than male, but reverse is the picture in case of casual labour as shown in Table-4.

**Table-4: Percentage of Workers by Employment Status, and Unemployment Rate During 2011-12**

Category/Indicator	Rural		Urban		Rural + Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Self-Employed	54.5	59.3	41.7	42.8	50.7	56.1
Regular Wage/Salaried Employees	10.0	5.6	43.4	42.8	19.8	12.7
Casual Labour	35.5	35.1	14.9	14.3	29.4	31.2
Unemployment Rate	1.7	1.7	3.0	5.2	2.1	2.4

Source: Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India, NSS 68<sup>th</sup> Round, 2011 – 12.

Thus, while 19.8% of the male workers were regular wage/salaried employees, only 12.7% of the female workers were in this category. But in the category of casual labour, the percentage of male was 29.4% and that of female was 31.2%. Further, the rate of unemployment was also higher for female. Against the male unemployment rate of 2.1%, female unemployment rate was 2.4% during 2011 – 2012.

Again, male-female wage differential has also been prominent in both rural as well as urban areas. Thus, average daily wages received by male regular wage/salaried employees in rural areas was Rs. 322.28 and

for females it was Rs. 201.56. Similar differences also exist in urban areas as well as for casual labourers in all types of works as shown in Table-5.

**Table-5: Daily Wages (Rs. 0.00) Received by Casual Labourers and Regular Wage/Salaried Employees of Age 15-59 Years during 2011 – 12**

Category of Persons		Category of Workers			
		Regular wage/salaried employees	Casual labour in works other than public works	Casual labour in public works other than MGNREG public works	Casual labour in MGNREG public works
Rural	Male	322.28	149.32	127.39	112.46
	Female	201.56	103.28	110.62	101.97
Urban	Male	469.87	182.04		
	Female	366.15	110.62		
Rural +	Male	417.08			
Urban	Female	307.72			

Source: Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India, NSS 68<sup>th</sup> Round, 2011 – 12.

Further, workplace harassment of women is rapidly increasing as more women join the workforce. In the labour market, bizarre scenario is created where girl children are trafficked for sex trade, domestic work and employment in occupationally hazardous condition. Exploitation and sexploitation have become the norm in the informal labour markets.

### 3.5 Mobility and Decision Making

Other than educational and economic empowerment, changes in women's mobility and social interaction, participation in decision making are also necessary. As per the estimates of NSS 68<sup>th</sup> Round (2011 – 2012), the proportion of female headed household in rural and urban areas were 11.5% and 12.4% respectively. Still today a very small percentage of Indian women have the freedom in household decision making, visiting their family and relatives and going outside home. Besides, in most of the Indian communities women do not have the right to decide how many children they will have. Moreover, a woman does not have the freedom to spend her spouse's earnings and even her own earnings as per her choice and need.

### 3.6 Political Participation

As far as political participation is concerned, women have a poor representation in India's Lok Sabha (Lower House), Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and also in State Assemblies. A total of 62 females have been elected in the General Election 2014 constituting only 11.4% share in the Lok Sabha, while in the Rajya Sabha only 11.9% representatives are women at present. Similarly, women representation in the state assemblies and state councils is also very poor. On an average, in the states, women share is only 8% in assemblies and only 4% in state councils as on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014. However, due to the reservation of one-third seats for women in all tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), representation of women in the PRIs has increased to 46.7% as on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013. As far as women's participation in the judiciary is concerned, there were only 2 women judges out of 30 judges in the Supreme Court and only 58 women judges out of 609 judges in different High Courts with maximum 25% in Delhi High Court and no women judge in 6 High Courts as on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 (Women and Men in India, 2014).

### 3.7 Violence/Crimes against Women

Women are still considered as burden and liabilities. They are also considered as properties. These kinds of attitudes give birth to the evil of violence against women (Dipna and Sharma, 2013). Crimes against women have been continuously increasing. A total of 3,09,546 cases of crime against women were reported in the country during the year 2013 as compared to 2,44,270 in the year 2012, thus showing an increase of 26.7% during the year 2013. The rate of crime committed against women was 52.2 in 2013. Crime head wise, 38% of the total crimes against women were related to the head 'Cruelty by husband and relatives', followed by 'Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' (23%), 'Kidnapping & Abduction' (17%) and 'Rape' (11%). (Crime in India, 2013).

From the above discussion, it has become clear that in spite of claim of 'gender inclusive growth' by the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), the mass of Indian women have been continuously bypassed and marginalised in the growth process.

## IV. Issues To Be Tackled For Women Empowerment And Gender Inclusive Growth

The above discussion shows that in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, economic opportunity and economic participation, political participation, access to education or access to nutrition and reproductive health care. Majority of Women in

India are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill equipped family and are not in a position to propel out themselves of the oppressive and regressive socio-economic conditions. Although lots of things are happening and large amount of resources are being spent in the name of women empowerment in India, the actual situation however, just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Deep-rooted systemic challenges still remain to be addressed. The following are some of the important issues to be tackled for women's empowerment and gender inclusive growth in India.

- Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women. Education, particularly higher education of women, is a key enabler of demographic change, family welfare, and better health and nutrition of women and their families. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge and ways of understanding and manipulating the world around them. Education of women has been shown to be associated with lower fertility, infant mortality, and better child health and nutrition. Hence, education of women should be given top priority because. Special measures should be taken to create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrollment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women.
- Child marriage, which is still prevalent in our society, must be stopped. This is because an early age at marriage of women is an indicator of the low status of women in society. At the individual level also, an early age at marriage for a woman is related to lower empowerment and increased risk of adverse reproductive and other health consequences. Besides, an early age at marriage typically curtails women's access to education and cuts short the time needed to develop and mature unhampered by responsibilities of marriage and children. Young brides also tend to be among the youngest members of their husbands' families and, by virtue of their young age and relationship, are unlikely to be accorded much power or independence (Kishor and Gupta, 2009).
- A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality. Women must have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. A holistic approach that takes care of the needs of women and the girls at all stages of the life cycle must be adopted.
- Women's tremendous role in growing the world's food supply means their participation should be central in any programme to improve farming techniques or natural resource management. The programmes for training women in agriculture and other allied occupations should be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.
- Gainful employment is also considered as an important source of empowerment for women. Employment, particularly for cash and in the formal sector, can empower women by providing financial independence, alternative sources of social identity, and exposure to power structures independent of kin networks (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). Therefore, female work participation needs to be increased; casualisation of women workers is to be reduced by increasing regular employment opportunities in the organised sector along with policy interventions in the unorganized sector to stop exploitation and workplace harassment. Women should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so as to elevate their status in the society.
- Violence against women must be eradicated from the society. Apart from strict laws and legislations, the violence against women can only be tackled through a change in attitude that needs to take place in the family, in the society and the female members of the society as well. Gender sensitization and gender training programmes are also important.
- Women's political participation has been considered a major measure of women's empowerment. Women's representation in the legislature is very poor in India. Necessary measures should be taken to increase women's representation in Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Assemblies and State Councils.
- Moreover, women's empowerment cannot take place unless women come together and decide to self-empower themselves. Women should come together as a unifying force and initiate self empowering actions at the ground level. A movement has to be build which awakens the individual self in each and every woman for creative and generative action (Dipna and Sharma, 2013).

## **V. Conclusion**

Although gender inclusive growth strategy is being adopted in India since the Eleventh Five Year Plan, gender disparity is still very high in all spheres, crimes against women are increasing and violence against women is all time high. Workplace harassment of women is another phenomenon which is rapidly increasing as more women join the workforce. Pre-age marriages are still taking place in large numbers and the number of girls going to school is abysmally low. All this is happening despite the fact that there are number of programmes and policy initiatives that is being run by the government and other bodies. Keeping this in mind it is crucial to have a reality check on what is happening on paper and what is the actual ground situation. As

women constitute almost one-half of India's population, without their engagement and empowerment, rapid economic progress is out of the question. For economic growth to be really inclusive, women empowerment is of utmost value. It is crucial for achieving sustainable economic development of our country and even beyond. Along with government, civil society organisations and all other stake holders must come forward and involve in the women empowerment process. Inclusive programmes involving the men are the need of the hour.

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