

## Role of Women in Indian Economy

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### Introduction

Women play a vital role for society. Apart from her importance in the social framework, a woman's vital role in village centric community activities, protecting our culture and in determining the consumption attitude makes her special for the economy and society of India. However, it is unfortunate that whereas the economy has been growing at an average rate of 8 percent, 52 percent of women in the country still suffer from malnutrition. They go hungry even when the granaries are full and overflowing. It is shameful that even today while giving birth to a child, on an average, 200 out of 1 lakh pregnant women lose their lives. 58 percent of pregnant women suffer from anemia. In terms of even literacy, though their position has improved but it is far behind the males, as still 34.5 percent of the women are illiterate (Census 2011).

**Key Words:** Globalization, Women, Women Empowerment, Women Worst Victim

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### Globalization and women

Sacrifices of women and ill-treatment meted out to them by the policy makers from the beginning impinge upon the status of the woman, which has got further hit due to the indiscriminate globalisation. Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Woman for XIth Plan concedes, "With the growing globalization and liberalization of the economy as well as increased privatization of services, women as a whole have been left behind and not been able to partake of the fruits of success. Mainstreaming of women into the new and emerging areas of growth is imperative. This will require training and skill upgradation in emerging trades, encouraging more women to take up vocational training and employment in the boom sectors. This will also require women to migrate to cities and metros for work. Provision of safe housing and other gender friendly facilities at work will need to be provided." It further states, "Another facet of globalization is related to the fact that many persons especially women will be severely affected with the advent of setting up of industrial parks, national highways, SEZ etc. as huge tracts of farm land are likely to be acquired for this purpose. This would require massive resettlement of the displaced persons and their families. It is therefore essential that a

viable resettlement policy and strategy is formulated and put in place immediately which clearly reflects the needs of women impacted by globalization/displacement."

### Policy for Women Empowerment only in on Documents

Government documents are full of all big statements about the policy of woman empowerment. The objectives of the declared policy of the government include –

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- (iv) Equal availability of health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

(vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

(vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

(viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and

(ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Though a scheme of gender budgeting has been introduced in a limited way, whereby attempt is being made to somehow assess the amount of expenditure made for women development, but there is hardly any attempt to have a meaningful assessment of the impact of government policy on the condition and status of women. We need to change the mindset and direction of policy making, and have a comprehensive framework for women empowerment, capable of addressing the difficulties faced by them.

#### **Contribution of Women: Not Even Accounted For**

Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented, or accounted for in official statistics. Women plow fields and harvest crops while working on farms; women weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries; women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores (e.g. cooking, fetching water, and looking after children). More women may be involved in undocumented or "disguised" wage work than in the formal labour force. There are estimates that over 90 percent of women workers are involved in the informal sector and not included in official statistics (The World Bank, 1991). The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servants, small traders, artisans, or field labourers on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled, low paying, and provide no additional benefits to the workers. Although such jobs are supposed to be recorded in the census, undercounting is likely because the boundaries between these activities and other forms of household work done by women are often clouded. Thus, the actual

labour force participation rate for women is likely to be higher than that which can be calculated from available data.

#### **Women Worst Victim of Inflation**

Inflation, especially food inflation, is hitting the poor population of the country very hard, but the impact is the worst on women. Though women enables the family to have the best food, given the resources, it faces hunger the most, as depicted from the official data that 52 percent of the women suffer from malnutrition. As a result of price rise in food products, what we call food inflation, family food bowl shrinks and woman, who tries to give the maximum to the other members of the family, has no option except to starve.

#### **Promotion of Liquor by Government Increases Suffering of Women**

Recently ASSOCHAM, a top trade body in India said that, liquor consumption is increasing at the rate of 30 percent per annum. Today liquor consumption is 7,000 million liters, which is expected to increase to 20 thousand million liters by 2015. State governments are upbeat about the rising revenues from liquor, at an average of 20 to 30 percent annually. Liquor import is rising at a much faster rate, as there was 700 percent increase in liquor imports last year. Trade bodies like ASSOCHAM are advocating for reducing the excise and custom duties to encourage liquor consumption. But who are the worst sufferers – they are women, who not only are subject to ill treatment and physical assaults, but also lose their precious savings in the process. One can understand the problems in implementing complete prohibition, but misdirected policies of the government to encourage liquor production, consumption and import cannot be justified at all.

#### **Loss of Self-employment is Loss of Women's Dignity**

According to 66<sup>th</sup> round of NSSO, in its data on employment and unemployment, 251 lakh people lost their self-employment and another 220 lakh joined the section of casual labour between 2004-05 and 2009-10. In this loss of self-employment, women are the worst sufferers. They not only lose self-employment for themselves, but also loses the dignity to work as an owner and is forced to work as

casual labour even if there is a loss of self employment of the male member in a family. Loss of self-employment is directly linked to the policy of indiscriminate globalisation and favours rendered to the companies, whereby land of farmers is being forcibly snatched and handed over to companies in the name of infrastructure, industrialisation, educational institutions etc. Further, traditional occupations like small retail trade are being fast brought under stress to accommodate corporate interests.

### **Women from Socially Deprived Sections Double Affected**

We understand that contribution of Indian women is neither appropriately accounted, nor our policy makers have the vision to appreciate the importance of women for sustainable development of the economy. Due to un-calibrated process of globalization, woman in general has been affected in terms of loss of livelihood, dignity, status and even nutrition, but the women from socially and economically deprived sections of the society are the worst and even doubly affected than others. They have not only lost their traditional occupations, assets and incomes, their social status also has further scaled down as a result of their exclusion from the growth process.

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