

# Status of Women Empowerment in India

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**Abstract**— “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”, the essence of power of women in leading not just their families but also the nation and the world. (Swami Vivekananda) ‘Empowerment’ is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Women's empowerment has become a significant aspect in development and economics. It refers to the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well being. With women population being around 50 per cent of the total population of the world, they have every right to be treated equally with men in every sphere of life. After independence of India, the constitution makers and the national leaders recognized the equal social position of women with men. Several measures were taken by the successive Governments to assign equal status to women in the economic, political and social fields. During the last few decades the Parliament and government of India has done much for women's emancipation both legally, politically and socially through several acts and schemes. This paper describes the present status of women on the parameters of economic participation and decision making in India. It also describes the Government initiatives for empowering women in inclusive growth. It concludes that the women and society should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

**Index Terms**- Economic participation, Decision Making, Government initiatives, Inclusive Growth, Women Empowerment.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

With women population being around 50 per cent of the total population of the world, they have every right to be treated equally with men in every sphere of life. Women Empowerment is one of the important aims in the eight Millennium Development Goals for socio-economic inclusion. It has become a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. This concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women.<sup>1</sup> According to The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW), “women empowerment is a study of acquiring knowledge and understand of gender relations, self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.<sup>2</sup> The status of Women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. In present era the position of women in India is one of the great socio-economic developments.

This paper describes the present status of women on the parameters of economic participation and decision making in India. It also describes the Government initiatives for empowering women in inclusive growth.

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## 2. OBJECTIVES

The present study is based on following objectives,

1. To show the current status and obstacles of Women in India.
2. To study about the government initiatives of women empowerment for gender equity.

## 3. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature and in order to examine the current status of women, obstacles related with women empowerment and the government initiatives of women empowerment for gender equity. The study is based on secondary data from different sources like books, internet sources, journals, news papers etc. are used. The data for the study has drawn from census and other related documents from statistics on women in India for the various years.

### 4.1 WOMEN IN GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX

The status women have made amazing contributions in the government, business world, the army and many more sectors. The Constitution of Indian has enshrined the principle of gender equality in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution grants equality to women and empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Although the constitution of India has granted men and women equal rights, gender disparity still remains and women are at a

disadvantage in several important ways. The World Bank's Gender Statistics 2012 compares the population wide data for the two genders on various inequality statistical measures.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 shows that there is high gender gap between men and women in India, indicators such as secondary school education where women had secured only 46% as against 54% of male during 2012. This rate is very low due to high rate of dropouts exists among the girls, especially in rural areas of India. In terms of having a formal financial account, women have just 26.5% whereas in men 43.7% during 2011. Further, the table reveals that there is need to fulfill all the existing gender gap, and to promote gender equality through policy making for women. Similarly, UNDP has published Gender Inequality Index and ranked India at 132 out of 148 countries.

**Table: 1 Gender Statistics Database India and World 2012**

Gender Statistic Measure	India		World	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Infant mortality rate, (per 1,000 live births)	44.3	43.5	32.6	37
Life expectancy at birth, (years)	68	64.5	72.9	68.7
Expected years of schooling	11.3	11.8	11.7	12.0
Primary school completion rate, (%)	96.6	96.3	NA	NA
Lower secondary school completion rate, (%)	76.0	77.9	70.2	70.5
Secondary school education, pupils (%)	46	54	47.6	52.4
Ratio to males in primary and secondary	0.98	1.0	0.97	1.0
Secondary school education, (%)	41.1	58.9	51.9	48.1
Account at a formal financial institution,	26.5	43.7	46.6	54.5
Deposits in a typical month	11.2	13.4	13.0	12.8
Withdrawals in a typical month,	18.6	12.7	15.5	12.8
Loan from a financial institution in past year,	6.7	8.6	8.1	10.0
Outstanding loan from banks for health	12.6	15.7	10.3	11.6
Outstanding loan from banks for purchase assets	2.26	2.35	6.6	7.4
Unemployment, (% of labour force,	4	3.1	NA	NA
Unemployment, youth	10.6	9.4	15.1	13.0
Ratio to male youth unemployment rate	1.13	1.0	1.14	1.0
Employees in agriculture, (% of total labour)	59.8	43	NA	NA
Employees in industry, (% of total labour)	20.7	26	NA	NA
Self-employed, (% employed)	85.5	80.6	NA	NA
Life expectancy at age 60, (years)	18.0	15.9	NA	NA

Source: World Bank, Gender Statistics Database India and world

The World Economic Forum publishes a Global Gender Gap Index. The index focuses on the relative gap between men and women on four parameters i.e., Health, Educational attainment, Economic participation, and Political empowerment. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2006, India was ranked 98 among 115 countries and polled.<sup>4</sup> During 2011 country was ranked 113 among 135 countries, since then, India has improved its rankings on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI) to 108/144 in 2017.<sup>5</sup> Table 2 and 3 represents the India's trend and women status in Global Gen-

der Gap index. India performs well on political empowerment ranked 20 to 15 among 115 and 144 countries during the period of 2006 to 2017. India scores poorly on overall female to male literacy and health rankings. India with a 2017 ranking of 141 had an overall score of 0.942. It also shows that there is poor performance in female work participation rate, and literacy rate in enrolment of girl's child Secondary education. The Govt. of India comes up with bold initiatives to promote better quality of education.

**Table: 2 Trend of India in Global Gender Gap 2006-17**

year	India's score	performance	India's rank	variance in rank
2006	0.601	-0.007	98/115	
2007	0.594	0.012	114/128	16
2008	0.606	0.009	113/134	-1
2009	0.615	0	114/134	1
2010	0.615	0.004	112/134	-2
2011	0.619	0.025	113/135	1
2012	0.644	0.011	105/135	-8
2013	0.655	-0.009	101/136	-4
2014	0.646	0.018	114/142	13
2015	0.664	0.019	108/145	-6
2016	0.683	-0.014	87/144	-21
2017	0.669	-0.669	108/144	21

Source: World Bank, Global Gender Gap Index

**Table: 3 India's Women Performance in Global Gender Gap Index 2008-17**

Indicates /	2008	2014	2015	2016	2017
Labour force participation (%)	36	30	29	28	28.50
Estimated earned income (PPP US\$)	1620	1980	2257	2103	2424
Legislators and managers (%)	3	-	-	-	12.9
Professional workers (%)	21	-	-	-	25.3
Literacy rate (%)	54	51	61	63	59.3
Enrol. in Primary Education (%)	87	84	84	93	92.9
Enrol. in Secondary Education(%)	-	-	46	62	62.2
Enrol. in Tertiary Education(%)	10	20	24	23	26.7
Female healthy life expectancy	54	58	59	59	60.4
Women in parliament(%)	9	11	12	12	11.8
Women in Ministerial level(%)	10	9	22	22	18.5
Female head of state (year)	15	21	21	21	20.5

Source: World Bank, Global Gender Gap Index.

#### 4.4 PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMY

The economic activity classified as organized and unorganized sector. Participation of women in economic activities in organized sector is measurable, but activities of women in unorganized sectors are difficult to measure. According to NSS 2011-12, the Labour Force Participation Rate of females (rural: 25.3%, urban: 15.5%) is lower than that of males (rural: 55.3%, urban: 56.3%) in both rural and urban areas (Table 8). As per NSS 2011-12, the average wage/ salary received per day by regular wage/ Salaried Employees of age 15-59 years for females (rural:Rs.201.56, urban:Rs.366.15) is lower than that of males (rural:Rs.322.28, urban:Rs.469.87) in both rural and urban areas and the gap is more in rural areas. The Workforce Participation Rate In 2011, at all India level is 25.51% for

females and 53.26% for males. While there is no rural-urban gap for males (53%), there is considerable rural-urban gap for females (rural -30%, urban- 15.4%). As per NSS 2011-12, 59.3% of the female workers in rural India are self employed while in urban areas the corresponding figure is 42.8%. Among the male workers, 54.5% in rural areas and 41.7% in urban areas are self employed. In rural areas the share of regular wage/ salaried employees is less for both females (5.6%) and males (10%) compared to urban areas (females: 42.8%, males: 43.4). As per NSS 2011-12, the Worker Population Ratio for females is higher in rural areas (24.8%) than urban areas (14.7%). For males, the ratios in rural and urban areas are 54.3% and 54.6% respectively. Thus, considerable gender gap exists in both rural and urban areas and the gap is higher in urban areas.

**Table 8: Labour Force Participation Rates (%) by Age-Group, Sex and Residence1. RURAL**

Age Group (Years)	1993-94		1999-2000		2004-2005		2009-2010		2011-2012	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
5-9	1.4	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.0
10-14	14.2	13.9	9.6	9.3	7.5	7.0	3.6	4.6	3.0	2.9
15-19	37.1	59.8	31.4	53.2	33.1	52.9	19.5	39.0	16.4	33.3
20-24	47.0	90.2	42.5	88.9	43.5	89.1	31.4	81.3	29.7	78.8
25-29	52.8	98.0	49.8	97.5	53.0	98.2	40.4	97.5	36.9	96.3
30-34	58.7	98.8	55.7	98.7	59.3	98.8	43.4	99.0	43.1	99.0
35-39	61.0	99.2	57.9	98.6	64.2	99.1	49.7	99.2	48.1	99.1
40-44	60.7	98.9	58.6	98.4	62.7	98.5	49.8	99.4	48.2	98.8
45-49	59.4	98.4	56.6	98.0	61.6	98.2	49.2	98.4	48.4	98.8
50-54	54.3	97.0	51.5	95.3	56.2	96.3	48.5	96.7	44.4	96.6
55-59	46.8	94.1	45.0	93.0	50.9	93.1	41.1	93.4	39.4	93.5
60 & above	24.1	69.9	21.8	64.0	25.4	64.5	22.6	64.7	21.3	64.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>56.1</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>55.3</b>

2.. URBAN

Age Group (Years)	1993-94		1999-2000		2004-2005		2009-2010		2011-2012	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
5-9	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
10-14	4.7	7.1	3.7	5.2	3.5	5.3	1.2	3.0	0.9	3.5
15-19	14.2	40.4	12.1	36.6	14.4	38.1	8.5	26.3	8.9	25.6
20-24	23.0	77.2	19.1	75.5	25.0	76.9	19.7	68.2	19.7	66.4
25-29	24.8	95.8	21.4	95.1	26.1	95.7	22.2	94.7	25.3	95.1
30-34	28.3	98.3	24.5	98.0	30.8	98.7	23.9	98.5	25.9	98.9
35-39	30.4	99.0	28.9	98.6	34.0	98.4	27.8	99.1	28.4	99.0
40-44	32.0	98.4	28.5	98.0	31.7	98.3	25.6	98.7	27.6	98.8
45-49	31.7	97.6	26.9	97.4	26.9	97.6	23.1	97.9	24.5	97.9
50-54	28.7	94.5	26.4	93.9	25.9	93.9	22.8	94.8	21.9	94.6
55-59	22.5	85.6	20.8	81.1	21.8	83.2	19.1	85.5	17.7	86.9
60 & above	11.4	44.3	9.4	40.2	10.0	36.6	7.0	34.2	7.8	36.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>56.3</b>

Source: National Sample Survey Office, 68 th Round, July 2011 - June 2012.

**Table 9: Unemployment rates (in the labour force)**

Round	Year	Rural		Urban	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
32nd	1977-78	2.0	1.3	12.4	5.4
38th	1983	0.7	1.4	4.9	5.1
43rd	1987-88	2.4	1.8	6.2	5.2
50th	1993-94	0.9	1.4	6.1	4.1
55th	1999-00	1.0	1.7	5.7	4.5
61st	2004-05	1.8	1.6	6.9	3.8
66th	2009-10	1.6	1.6	5.7	2.8
68th	2011-12	1.7	1.7	5.2	3.0

Source: National Sample Survey Office, 68 th Round.

Table 9 shows Unemployment Rate Unemployment Rate (UR) is more for females than males 15 years and above in both rural and urban areas with the gap very wide for the urban. In 2011-12, 11.5% households in rural areas and 12.4 households in urban areas are female headed households as compared to 9.7% and 10.6% respectively in 1993-94 as per National Sample Survey (Table 10).

**Table: 10 Female Headed Households & their Average Size by Residence**

year	No. of female headed households per 1000 hhs			
	Rural	%	Urban	%
July 1993-June 1994	97	9.7	106	10.6
July 1999-June 2000	104	10.4	94	9.4
July 2004-June 2005	113	11.3	111	11.1
July 2009-June 2010	118	11.8	116	11.6
July 2011-June 2012	115	11.5	115	11.5

Source: National Sample Survey Office.

➤ **Initiatives in Economic Empowerment of Women**

Despite these challenges, millions and millions of women in India are breaking old barriers and charting their own destiny. The flagship programme like **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (2005)**, providing livelihood security to thousands of rural women have also provided them with economic security, empowered them and created rural assets simultaneously. The **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (1993)** which is working exclusively for poor women, providing them with regular funds and facilitating market linkages. **Mahila E-Haat (2016)** has been launched as a start up initiative by the RMK for meeting the aspirations and needs of women entrepreneurs. This web based marketing, initiative under Digital India, will facilitate the access of women to the global market and promote the development of relations between the business community and women entrepreneurs. Financial Inclusion is one of the top most priorities of the government. **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (2014)** has given confidence to lakhs of women in opening their first bank account and a breakthrough to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty and debt. According to the third annual survey by the Gates Foundation 47 per cent women now have a PMJDY bank account”.

**Table: 11 Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana statistics (Crores)**

Bank Type	Number of Accounts			
	Rural	Urban	Total	Female
Public Sector Banks	13.48	11.62	25.09	13.15
Regional Rural Banks	4.21	0.78	4.99	2.73
Private Banks	0.60	0.39	0.99	0.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.29</b>	<b>12.79</b>	<b>31.07</b>	<b>16.40</b>

Source: www.jandhan.in

Table 11 shows that as on 7 February 2018, over 31 crore (310 million) bank accounts were opened in which female accounts are more than men and over ₹745 billion (US\$12 billion) were deposited under the scheme.<sup>12</sup> This helps to promote financial inclusion in India. To secure the financial future of the girl

child, a small savings scheme **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (2015)** has also been launched under the Beti Padhao Beti Bachao initiative. 87 lakh accounts have been opened upto June 2016 under SSY across the country. **The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016**, passed in the Rajya Sabha which increased the maternity leave for working women from 12 to 26 weeks will definitely promote female workforce participation in India.

#### 4.5 Participation of Women in Decision Making

As of January 2017, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is 23.3%.<sup>[1]</sup> As of 2016, Women ministers constituted 12% in Central Council of Ministers (9 out of 75). In the 16th Lok Sabha, 12% of the total members are women (64 out of 534). Out of the 318 first time elected members of the 16th Lok Sabha, 43 are women (14%). There is an improvement in the participation of women electors in the General elections (Lok Sabha) over the years and in the 16th Lok Sabha election 66% of women electors have participated vis-a-vis 67% participation by male electors. As in 2016, 9% of the State Assembly members and 5% of the State Council members are women. Women in Panchayats of the 28 States/UTs, whose data on elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are available, 14 States have equal representation of women and men.

Table: 12

Representation of women in the central council of ministers

Year	Number of Ministers			Number of Women Ministers			% Women in Central Council
	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister	
1985	15	25	0	1	3	0	10.0
1990	17	17	5	0	1	1	5.1
1995	12	37	3	1	4	1	11.5
1996	18	21	0	0	1	0	2.6
1997	20	24	0	0	5	0	11.4
1998	21	21	0	1	3	0	9.5
2002	32	41	0	2	6	0	11.0
2003	30	48	0	1	5	0	7.7
2004	29	39	0	1	6	0	10.3
2009	40	38	0	3	4	0	9.0
2011	32	44	0	2	2	0	10.5
2012	31	43	0	2	6	0	10.8
2013	31	47	0	3	9	0	15.4
2014	23	22	0	6	1	0	15.6
2015	23	22	0	6	2	0	17.8
2016	26	49	0	5	4	0	12.0

Source: Lok-Sabha secretariat, New Delhi, including ministers of state with independent charge

#### ➤ Initiatives in Political Empowerment of Women

A number of countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from the local to the national. In an effort to increase women's participation in politics in India, a 1993 constitutional amend-

ment mandated that a randomly selected third of leadership positions at every level of local government be reserved for women.<sup>[3]</sup> In terms of voter's perception of female leaders, reservation did not improve the implicit or explicit distaste for female leaders—in fact, the relative explicit preference for male leaders was actually strengthened in villages that had experienced a quota. Moreover, the reservation policy significantly improved women's prospects in elections open to both sexes, but only after two rounds of reservation within the same village. Political reservation for women has also impacted the aspirations and educational attainment for teenage girls in India.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Women empowerment plays a significant role in the developing countries like India. The addressing issues related to empowerment of women from macro-point of reducing gender imbalances between economic, social and political identity of woman presents a new agenda. Women are an integral part of a society. Ensuring gender equality, and combating discrimination and violence against women are integral to our national pursuit of forging inclusive society and development. The Government is determined to end violence of all kinds against women and girls and has framed enabling legislations. They play an important role in determining the destiny of a nation. Therefore, what is required for state policies that actually seek to create the conditions for meaningful life-chances for women rather than worry about balancing numbers? Thus road map for women empowerment is there but still we have miles to go on this path of empowerment. Though some improvement is reflected, yet a lot remains to be done.

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