

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA: A STUDY**

**DR. IMTIYAZ AHMAD WANI**

*Lecturer, Department of Sociology,  
Government Degree College Pulwama, Kashmir  
Email: imtiyazwani07@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*“Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity”- Mahatma Gandhi*

*Women have always contributed to achieving the economic prosperity of Indian society. Women in rural India also, despite suffering from the problems like health, malnutrition, repeated childbearing and lack of education, engage themselves in direct and allied agricultural activities, handcraft products, embroidery, etc; to boost the economy of their family and society. But it is the gender bias that still exists at every social stratum, even in the most educated and developed society, is unable to digest this visible contribution of women in all walks of life. In some regions, patriarchal societies diminish the role of women in important matters. Unfortunately, this misogynist thinking is still deep-rooted in our contemporary society and there are no apparent signs of improving this perspective to the unprejudiced and unbiased one. This study will aim to assess the socio-economic conditions of women and the inequality they face in contemporary India.*

**Keywords:** *Economy, Inequality, Society, Women, Prejudice, Problems, Contribution, Poverty.*

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**DR. IMTIYAZ AHMAD WANI**

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## **Introduction**

Society, politics and economics are interrelated. One influences the courses of others. So it is easily understood if women have no right in the social, political and economic platform, who will take the lead to claim the rights for them? The difference between man and woman is conceptualized in terms of 'gender' that broadly refers to the cultural construction of the sexual difference between male and female in human society and 'empowerment is a means to improve the positions of women by providing them material, intellectual and socio-economic and socio-political rights equal with men in the society and state. The subordinate position of women has been the impetus to develop the concept of empowerment, the process itself operates within the structure of male dominance.<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of women to a society's transition from pre-literate to literate likewise is undeniable. Basic education is key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets. Research has shown that education can improve agricultural productivity, enhance the status of girls and women, reduce population growth rates, enhance environmental protection and widely raise the standard of living. Among all factors of production human resources are the most valuable and potent. It is the only resource having life and sense. This factor controls all other factors and contributes significantly to the prosperity of all sectors. To have more output, from this resource, the main key is to recognize the role of women.

"Women, who constitute half of the world's population by an accident of birth, perform two-thirds of the world's work, receive one-tenth of its income and own less than one-hundredth of its property. In India, while they produce 50 percent of the food consumed by the country, they earn only 10 percent of the income and own 10 percent of the property or wealth of the country. Merely providing certain rights and protection from social inequalities does not solve the issue of their socio-economic status. Measures to improve the status of women and the quality of their life must be wedded to various economic development programs. The Constitution guarantees formal equality and radical social reforms, forbidding child marriage, legalizing remarriage of widows and providing equal share to women in the joint family property under the Inheritance Act which introduced important innovations in the Indian social structure affecting women's status and role. But the mere enactment of laws does not change attitudes and ironically, these advances in social legislation have engendered in some measure an attitude of complacency whilst the views of society towards the position of women have not changed much over the years."<sup>2</sup>

## **The Economic Vulnerability of Women**

The condition of women is miserable in India concerning various socio-economic aspects:

### **a) Poverty**

*"Poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent on them and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help."* –Latvia 1998. We can define poverty as the condition where the basic needs of a family-like food, shelter, clothing and education are not fulfilled. It can lead to other problems like poor literacy, unemployment, malnutrition, etc. A poor person is not able to get an education due to a lack of money and therefore remains unemployed. An unemployed person is not able to buy enough and nutritious food for his family and their health decline. A jobless person remains poor only. Thus we can see that poverty is the root cause of other problems. Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality in the world. It denies women their voices, devalues their work and makes women's position unequal to men's, from the household to the national and global levels. Across the world, women are in the lowest-paid work. "75 percent of women in developing regions are in the informal economy where they are less likely to have employment contracts, legal rights, or social protection and are often paid enough to escape poverty. 600 million are in the most insecure and precarious forms of work".<sup>3</sup>

### **b) Economic Exploitation**

On the world level, women and girls together carry two-third of the burden of the world's work yet receive only a tenth of the world's income. They form 40 percent of the paid labor force. Though women constitute half of the world's population yet they own less than one percent of the world's property (UNDP Human Development Report 1995). According to UN Report (2005): "*women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property*". The condition of women in India is more miserable in every field of social life. They are paid half of the three-quarters of the money while their male counterparts earn for the same job. In India a predominantly agricultural country, women do more than half of the total agricultural work. But their work is not valued. On average, a woman works 15 to 16 hours a day unpaid at home and underpaid outside. Besides, the workload either in the field or in the factories or offices, the women have to do the household such as cooking, washing, cleaning up the house, etc. The younger women, besides all these, have to carry a load of early pregnancy, childbirth and

breastfeeding. In terms of help offered to people for their various functions women seem to receive the least attention from society.

### c) Violence

In recent years there has been an alarming increase in atrocities and violence against women in the country. It is estimated that the growth rate of crime against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2025, which implies that progressively a greater number of women are becoming victims of violence. The United Nations Commission on the status of women defines violence against women to include “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.”<sup>4</sup>

Broadly speaking violence lies in the power of dynamics of social situation. Violence is not simply aggression or injury committed by one individual against another; it is more precisely the abuse of power. The behavior, in which a more powerful person takes advantage of and abuses a less powerful one, is an act of violence. This relationship of power differential is obvious in sexual violence against women, which includes rape, kidnapping and abduction, molestation, eve-teasing, sexual harassment at the workplace, etc.

The main causes of violence are unequal power relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy and economic dependence of women, dowry, low moral values, negative portrayal of women’s image, no participation in decision-making, gender stereotypes and a negative mindset.

### Review of Literature

#### **Vivian B. Pender (2016)***The Status of Women*

*Violence, Identity and Activism.* This book examines the status of women in different eras and different areas of society. The author threw light on the grim conditions of women and children in society. The plight of poor women who are unable to digest the torture, yet not able to raise their voice against it. This book also talked about the gap between theory and practice regarding socio-economic issues of women.

#### **Elaine Weiss (2004)***Surviving Domestic Violence*

*Voices of Women Who Broke Free.* This book tells the stories of twelve women. Each was a victim of domestic violence. This book also focuses on the entire spectrum of emotional, verbal, sexual and physical abuse. In recent years there has been an alarming increase in atrocities and violence against women, but according to Elaine Weiss, it has been observed from these respondents that most abused women are not passive victims.

**Rathindra Nath Pramanik, Ashim Kumar Adhikary (2006)***Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment*

The essays compiled in this book are concerned broadly with objective and subjective evaluations of gender inequalities and women's empowerment in modern India. The women are seen as 'women' belonging to a weaker category of populations in the society and they are not treated as individuals or persons having creative potentiality and freedom for self-expression. The book relates gender inequality to the dominant social system of patriarchy in India and suggests for women to empower themselves through active participation in the process of development, as a practical means to combat male dominance. The author observes that the women of rural India perform a lot of agricultural work in fields and farms in addition to their household chores. The author also brings in the issue of technological intervention in the process of women's empowerment.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the socio-economic status of women.
2. To focus on the domestic problems of women.
3. To highlight the role of women in promoting economic prosperity.
4. Challenges for women in society.

**Research Methodology**

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary data. The researcher used journals, articles, books, reports, newspapers and related studies for data collection.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The majority part of the research work depends upon secondary data. In-depth structured, semi-structured one-on-one elite interviews have not been conducted in this study.

**Conclusion**

All types of crime are indeed on the increase in the country along with the increase in population and development of the country. The list of crimes that are committed against women seems to be endlessly extending from simple harassment to even denying them the very right to exist. The gender bias prevailing in society puts women in a disadvantageous position in different fields right from birth. Without socio-economic equality for women in poor sectors of India, the impacts of efforts at development cannot become fully realized. It is difficult for a single woman to raise her voice against injustice that is done to her whether within the family or outside. More and more women organizations must be developed to take up the issues of

women and create awareness among the women themselves. We as a society must value women as human resource assets and not liabilities. Socio-economic development can both empower women and raise the status of the Indian economy. Women need employment justice. Education, vocational training and skill improvements would increase the capacity for gainful economic participation of women in India.

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