

## Levels of Literacy and Female Work Participation: The Key to Socio-economic Development

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### **Abstract**

*“Women can become agents of change if four conditions are fulfilled: they acquire more than basic education; they have legal rights of ownership of the property; they have an independent source of income; and finally, they can work outside the home” . - Amartya Sen*

*“When women move forward, the family moves the village moves and the nation moves” .- J. L. Nehru.*

*“Although women represent only 50% of the total population, they contribute 75% to the development of our society while men contribute only 25%.” . - Late Dr. Manibhai Desai*

*These words emphasize the role and the importance of women in any society. A nation's progress is closely connected with the status of its women. Women constitute about fifty percent of the total population of our nation. They are a valuable human resource and their socio-economic development is imperative for sustainable development. But, Indian society has always been a male-dominated society and women have always been rated very low and still they lag behind men in many socio-economic, cultural, political and as well as so many other development parameters. The main aim of the study is to analyze the role of female Literacy and work participation in the socioeconomic development of women. Besides this, some other objectives are: to underline the efforts adopted by the government for the development of women; and to suggest creative strategies for the development of women. This study is mainly based on secondary data collected from various censuses in India as well as the literature review of books, journals and various national and international reports.*

### **Keywords**

*Female literacy; Women's Work Participation; Socio-economic Development.*

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**Introduction:**

“Although women represent only 50% of the total population, they contribute 75% to the development of our society while men contribute only 25%.” Late Dr. Manibhai Desai.

Women constitute about fifty percent of the total population of our nation. They are a valuable human resource and their socio-economic development is imperative for sustainable development. But, Indian society has always been a male-dominated society and women have always been rated very low and still they lag behind men in many socio-economic, cultural, political and as well as so many other development parameters. Today women’s development and gender equality are the need of the hour. Our laws, development policies and many programs are aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. The Constitution of India and other progressive laws of the land stressed on removal of disparities between the males and females and have renewed many disabilities against women in Indian society. The principles of gender equality are enshrined in the Indian constitution. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the constitution provide 33% reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies. This has enabled women to engage in the mainstream discourse of decision-making and development. Despite of strong guarantee of the Indian Constitution gender injustice does exist in our nation. The main factors responsible for this such as Poverty, Illiteracy, Education, Employment, Food Intake, nutrition and Health Hazards. Out of these more important factors related to the female development are the education, employment, income their work participation in economic activities.

A country can achieve a high rate of socio-economic development through the best and the fullest use of its resources. In a developing country like India, burdened with a huge population, an ideal strategy would be to utilize its human resources to the maximum for the rapid socio-economic growth of the nation. This would necessitate optimum participation of women in all sectors of the economy. In the world of today and tomorrow any type of gender discrimination in any field especially the education, health and occupational fields has no chance to survive, and sooner the latter females are provided with opportunities to share the task of national development along with the males. Gender bias patterns, female feticide and female infanticide, domestic violence etc. are the main causes of the backwardness of the females in the country. It seems in its various forms such as preventing a large proportion of women from obtaining education, healthcare facilities, receive employment, legal support and various other basic amenities of

life. It is the factual truth that Education; Health, Hygiene & Nutrition; Housing; Infrastructure; Employment and Skill Development are the basic development indicators of any nation's socioeconomic development, in which female education is an important enhancer to increase earnings, generate employment and income and as well as the reducing poverty among them.

**Table:-1- Some Basic Development Indicators Related to Women's Status in India**

1. Income & Earnings; Employment
2. Labour Force Participation
3. Work Participation Rate
4. Human Development Index
5. GDI, GEI
6. Skilled Labour, Own Business/ Self Employed,
7. Own land & Pucca House, Ownership of assets
8. Poverty, Education and Literacy
9. Skill development and training
10. Nos. of Girls schools, Colleges or Higher Institutions:- Technical, Professional and Vocational Institutions etc.
11. Enrolment Ratio and Drop-out
12. Equal Treatment in in school & Domestic life
13. Relationship with spouse; Participation and Decision Making in Household Management;
14. Ability to make childbearing decisions
15. Freedom from gender-based domestic violence etc.
16. Child labor and Domestic Chores and Living Standards
17. Maternal Literacy
18. Mortality Rate, Birth Rate and Death Rate,
19. Life Expectancy
20. Family Planning; No. of Children,
21. Good Health, Nutrition /Balanced Diet, Health care and Sanitation Facilities etc.
22. Social Customs & Religious believes
23. Age at Marriage, Child Marriage; Dowry System
24. Female infanticides; Sex-Selective Abortions etc. Post Puberty Practices.

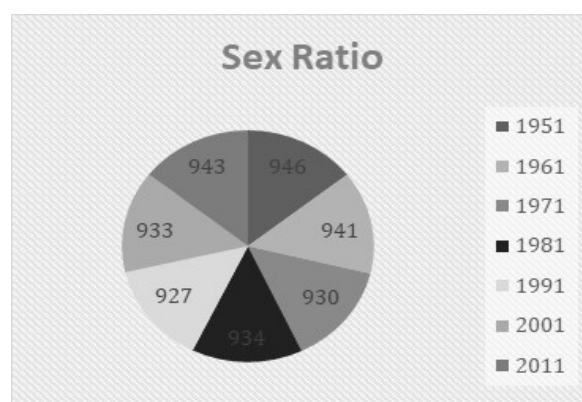
25. Knowledge of Political and Electoral systems from local governance to National Governance
26. Right to Vote and Right to Choose
27. Political Empowerment
28. Social Justice and Freedom
29. Knowledge of Legal Rights and Women's Rights
30. Land & Property Rights; Raise to voice against crime and harassment at home and workplace etc.

**Source: Own analysis based on Review of Literature**

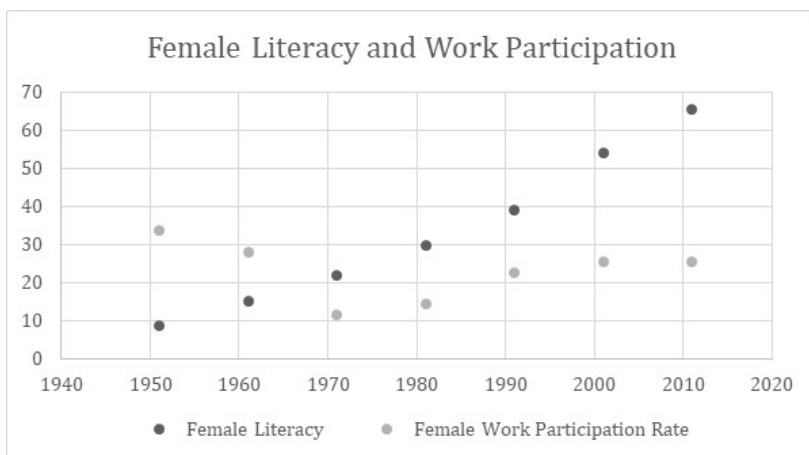
**Table: 2- Demographic Structure of Female**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Sex Ratio</b> | <b>Female Literacy</b> | <b>Female Work Participation Rate</b> |
|-------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1951        | 946              | 8.86                   | 33.73                                 |
| 1961        | 941              | 15.35                  | 27.96                                 |
| 1971        | 930              | 21.97                  | 11.86                                 |
| 1981        | 934              | 29.76                  | 14.44                                 |
| 1991        | 927              | 39.29                  | 22.69                                 |
| 2001        | 933              | 54.20                  | 25.7                                  |
| 2011        | 943              | 65.46                  | 25.51                                 |

**Source : Census of India**



**Figure:1**

**Figure:2****Aims & Methodology of the Study**

The main aim of the study is to analyse the role of female Literacy and work participation in the socio-economic development of women in. Besides this, some other objectives are: to underline the efforts adopted by the government for the development of women; and to suggest creative strategies for the development of women. This study is mainly based on secondary data collected from various censuses in India as well as the literature review of books, journals and various national and international reports.

**Review of Literature****A. Female Literacy and Development**

As Kofi Annan said, “Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship.”

Literacy or education in India is a very significant indicator for socio-economic progress as well as human capital development of any society. The literacy of girls is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Sera Roy (2016) stated in her study that there is an increased awareness that education is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. Education is seen as a critical factor in breaking the inter-generational cycle of transmission of poverty. The power of education lies not just in imparting formal literacy, but rather in the acquisition of skills that enable access to multiple literacy economic, legal, health, political and media etc. Education is a key intervention in initiating

and sustaining processes of empowerment. Good quality education can help women and marginalized communities to: (a) improve their status, (b) enable them to have greater access to information and resources and (c) challenge various forms of discrimination. Education helps strengthen democratic processes as it allows for greater and more equitable participation. Being educated leads to greater self-confidence and self-esteem. It enables engagement with development processes and institutions of governance from a position of strength. Poor women from socially disadvantaged communities are invariably not literate and therefore find themselves at a disadvantage when participating in development processes. Babita reported that educational attainment is a significant indicator of a country's level of human capital development. Women's literacy determines mothers and child health has now become a key indicator of economic development. This is also the fact that literacy and good health go together. Health is a function, not only of medical care but of the overall integrated development of society, cultural, economic, educational, social and political. Each of these aspects has a deep influence on health, which in turn influences all these aspects. Hence, it is not possible to raise the health status and quality of life unless such efforts are integrated with the wider efforts to bring about the overall transformation of a society. Among the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were adopted by the 189 members of the United Nations (UN) in 2000, at least four are directly related to child health or nutritional status. In addition to being a development indicator itself, child health is also closely associated with other development indicators, such as adult health, educational attainment, productivity and income. It is a widely accepted belief that if a woman in the family concerned is literate, then the entire family associated with her will be literate and the educated mother can take care of her children's nutrition and health to a good extent. Among the potential determinants of child health, the mother's education has been the focus of decision-makers. More educated mothers may have healthier children because they have better knowledge about health care and nutrition, have healthier behavior, and provide a more sanitary and safer environment for their children. Because the education of the mother is supposed to be very much correlated to the child's health and nutrition. *Paul Kunwar and Pillai (2002)* studied of the health of primary school children was correlated with the levels of literacy of their mothers. The study showed a direct relationship between the levels of literacy of parents and the nutritional level of children. When they tested samples for mother and father in relation to the sex to the child, it was noted that the nutritional status of boys

and girls was not different irrespective of the mother's literacy level. Singh et.al also finds in their study that the education of women helps in reducing fertility and infant and child mortality rates. The lower fertility and infant mortality rates and better healthcare practices reduce suffering, improve maternal health and increase female labour force participation rates. Social insecurity feelings, adequate protection and ignorance of legal rights are also barriers among females which are responsible for disattachment to taking participation in every walk of life. Sultana (2010) said that education is the most powerful tool for socio-economic development as it expands knowledge and skills which helps to get employment. When women are employed, they can contribute to the family income which reduces poverty. Therefore, it can be concluded that women play an important role directly or indirectly socio-economic development of the country.

#### **B. Women Development through Employment and Work Participation**

“Women can become agents of change if four conditions are fulfilled: they acquire more than basic education; they have legal rights of ownership of property; they have an independent source of income; and finally, they can work outside the home” Amartya Sen

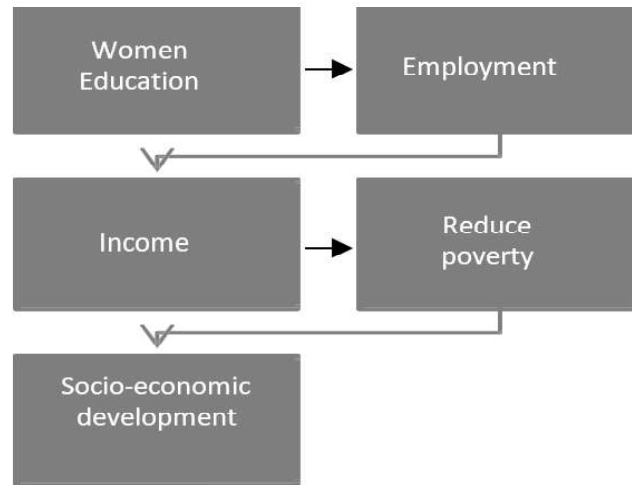
The standard of living is a composite index and is based on various socio-economic variables such as income, consumption, employment, asset structure, education, housing position and social status. Among all these variables, the income level plays a vital role in the determination of other variables but income is generated through employment. Thus, employment status has an important bearing on the standard of living and in this way, the importance of employment data in measuring the living standard does not need any emphasis. Employment and living standards are correlated. Insufficient and unequal access to adequate employment for females are the major causes of poverty and inequality among females in India.

One of the fallouts of the development debates has been a keen interest in women's economic roles. Women's work in the economy is not sufficiently recorded, recognized and rewarded. Economic development has made women's economic conditions increasingly precarious. Debates around the concept and definition of work, time-allocation studies, visibility of women's statistics and indicators, housework, the economics of unpaid family work in rural households for both household consumption and household production, women's work for family's survival needs such as fetching water, collection of fodder, fuel wood and fruits, livestock raising and kitchen gardening that involve hours of backbreaking and

strenuous work have challenged basic premises of mainstream economics, sociology and development planning.

The size of the workforce in a country plays an important role in determining the level of its economic activity. As women constitute half of the total population in the country, their contribution to economic activities is very crucial. Women's involvement in the workforce not only influences economic development but it also affects their lives in terms of opportunities and benefits. *Duflo* said in his study that the economic development of a region or country depends largely on the productivity of both male as well as female populations. There is a bi-directional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development - health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. This bi-directional relationship is based on the following rationales: (i) Development can alone play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women and (ii) Continuing discrimination against women can hinder development or empowerment can accelerate development. In India, women constitute nearly half of the total population, so their contribution to economic activities is effective as well as valuable. Their participation in the workforce emerges as an indicator of the development of the country. *Vijay Vir Singh and Madhu Pundir* argued that on the one hand economic development empowers women, while on the other empowering women brings about changes in decision-making, which have a direct impact on development. Without economic development, the empowerment of women is an empty promise. Finally, continuous policy implementation to bring about gender equality is the utmost need, in their view. *Valsamma Antony* advocates that compulsory education, mental revolution, credit facilities, formulation of self-help groups and gainful employment are the essential for the development of women and helpful for the women's empowerment. In fact, the strong relations between women's work participation and economic development are well established. The status of women cannot be raised without opening up opportunities for independent income and employment. Further, if they are economically independent they will have better decision-making opportunities in all phases of life and will also raise their living standard.





**Figure:3**

**Source :** Sultana, A.M. (2010), “Women Education, Empowerment and Socio-economic Development:: A Theoretical Framework,” IUSRCE, Kulalumpur Malaysia.

**Summing Up**

“When women move forward, the family moves the village moves and the nation moves” stated J. L. Nehru. Only when the women are in the mainstream of progress a country can reach its goal of economic and social development. The Study finds that there are so many reasons for the backwardness of women in Indian society some of them are cultural, religious and traditional values, inequality patterns, and Domestic and sexual violence, gender disparity is still very high in its various forms of socially, economically, and politically. Despite this low levels of literacy, Lack of medical facilities, Unhygienic and poor living conditions, and income and employment etc. The government of India started many socio-economic development programs for the upliftment of women as well as initiated many political and legal amendments for the women’s empowerment such as ICDS, National Literacy Mission 1988; Beti Bachao Beti Padhao; Kasturba Balika Vidhalya; Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan; Special Scholarship; School Chalo Abhiyan; PM Sri School Yojna; Balika Samriddhi Yojna; PM Rojgar Protsahan Yojna; Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojna; P.M.Kaushal Vikas Yojna; PM Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan; Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojna; Rural Self Employment Training Institutes; Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); PM Employment Generation Programme; Skill India Mission; Ujjawala Yojna; Deen Dayal Antodaya Yojna; PM Matra Vandana Yojna; Local to Vocal Yojna; PM Mudra Yojna; PM Street Vendors Atma Nirbhar Nidhi Scheme; PM Avas Yojna; Microfinance facilities to set up an enterprises; Janni Suraksha Yojna; Ayushman Health Card; National Health Mission; Har Ghar Nal Jal Yojna for safe drinking water; Researvation in Lok Sabha; Constitutional Rights and Remedies; Equal rights, cultural freedom and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres, Equal pay for equal work, Protection for Human Rights, Rights to Property and Rights to Education etc. Based on the above discussion it can be said that female literacy and education play a pivotal role in increasing work participation in each sector of the economy formal and informal sectors and as well as the in the development of herself. Many studies also advocated that educated and employed women can able to contribute to the family income which helps them to reduce poverty. The female status is a good sign of the socio-economic development of the country. India 's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had aptly remarked, "I have long been convinced that a nation's progress is intimately connected with the status of its women."

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