



PROFILE OF INDIAN WOMEN AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

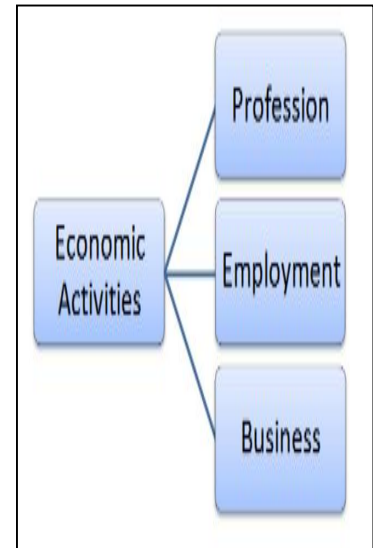
Though not comparable with USA, where more than 45% of working population is women, in India, the number of working women has been increasing day by day. In India, working women account for 15% of the total urban female population of 150 million, the presence of present day women is found almost in all sectors, be it education, medical, law, space research, engineering, IT, share and commodity broking, business and the like. More working women are found in metro cities than smaller cities. Obviously the ability of earning has reduced financial dependence of women on males be it father, brother, husband or son.

KEY WORDS: Glass-ceiling Approach, Economic Activities, Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurship,

1: INTRODUCTION

The first Prime Minister of free India PanditJawaharlaljiNeharu has once rightly said 'You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women' Gone are the days when women used to prefer the conventional occupations like nursing, gardening or teaching, where the care-taking and affection was required. She has no longer remained a dependent figure but she has been sharing an equal status with men almost in fields of life and leaving her footprints there. She is striving to shoulder the dual responsibilities like loving mother and caring wife at one hand and dutiful and committed employee or business person at the other. In some recent decades, Indian women had traversed from conventional handling 'Kitchen, Kids and Knitting' to Powder (Spices), Papad& Pickles', to Electricity, Electronics, Energy and Engineering.'She has been excelling in almost all fields which were, once upon a time, male-dominated. She is successfully handling both--- 'Kitchen' and 'Cabin'

Throughout the history, women have generally been restricted to the role of a home-maker; that of a mother and wife. Over the time, Indian women has passed through various ups and downs till she happened to be participant in various male-dominated fields commanding economic activities and become economic decision-maker.



2: RISE AND FALL IN STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

In India, there were distinct stages of rise and fall in the status of women. During the Vedic period, women were regarded as men's friends and co-workers. No religious rites could be performed by man without the participation of his wife, during that period. Patanjali and Katyayana, the Ancient Indian grammarians, revealed that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rig Vedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband, scriptures such as Rig-Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi. But in the post Vedic period, the enlightened precept that '*Woman does not deserve independence*' became prevalent and it was considered the prime duty of father, husband and son respectively to control women as a daughter, wife and mother. In the age of Dharmashastra's 'Codes of conduct' prescribing the behaviour norms for women were evolved which pulled down the position of women all-time low.

During the medieval period, the women's position further deteriorated with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal Empire and later Christianity curtailed women's freedom and rights to a considerable extent. Islam has adopted a just approach towards women proclaiming that basically both being human entities, there are no differences as such between a man and a woman. Regarding dignity of mankind Holy Quran does not talk of man and woman separately. Holy Quran proclaims that the Lord Almighty Allah granted a high rank to her femininity and made it compulsory for man to live in her company. The Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H.) issued forceful warnings to men for ensuring the observation of women's rights. In the matter concerning property, Islam has given equal rights to men and women. However the priestly class misinterpreted the sacred texts which caused to deteriorating position of women in Islam.

Despite the disapproving conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. For example, Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. Durgavati, the Gond Queen ruled for fifteen years. Chand bibi defended Ahmednagar sultanate against the mighty Mughal forces of Akbar. Jahangir's wife Noor-Jahan effectively exercised imperial power. The Mughal princesses Jahan-Ara and Zaib-un-Nissa were well-known poets, who influenced the ruling administration.

Because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator Shivaji's mother, Jijabai was deputed as queen regent. Mirabai, Akkamahadevi and Rani Janabai, the female saint-poets, played vital role in restoring women's status through Bhakti Movement. Mahanubhav and Varkari, the Bhakti sects within Hinduism were principal movements within the Hindu fold to openly advocate social justice and equality between men and women.

Guru Nanak, the first Sikhs also preached the message of equality between men and women, Jainism too allowed women to be admitted to the religious order, by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions, Buddha preached that women's spiritual capacities are equal to men's.

3: WOMEN DURING THE BRITISH RULE AND IN FREE INDIA

During the British rule in India the customs of polygamy, the *purdah* (*burakha*), the denial of women's right over property, child marriages, sati and devdasi further caused to deteriorate the once upon glorious status of Indian women. Even in that period of adversity women's bravery excelled, KitturChennamma led an armed rebellion against the British, Abbakka Rani led the defense against invading European armies notably the Portuguese in 16th century, Rani Laxmibai, properly known as the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian rebellion of 1857 against the British, Begum Hazratmahal, the co-ruler of Awadh, led the revolt of 1857 and straightway refused the deals with the British, the Begums of Bhopal, fought against foreign aggression. Chandramukhi Basu, Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi were the earlier Indian Women to obtain educational degrees.

Due to concerted efforts and motivation of the then social reformers and able political leaders elevated the status of women in India Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Nehru, and ArunaAsafAli, were the prominent figures in freedom struggle. PanditaRamabai did notable work for upliftment of women. Without mention of names BhikajiCama, PritilataWaddedar, Kasturba Gandhi, VijayalakshmiPandit, SuchetaKriplani, RajkumariAmritKaur, MuthhuLakshmi Reddy, DurgabaiDeshmukhthe story of India's independence struggle cannot be completed.

Nascent women's movement and enactment of a number of progressive laws brought about the profound changes in the history of women in India. British rulersfavaoured and encouraged education for women. The need to encourage education for women in general and higher education in particular was recognized in free India. In free and modern India, women have graced the high constitutional positions like President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Loksabha and Leader of the Opposition Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years is the world's longest serving women Prime Minister and PratibhataiPatil graced the highest constitutional chair of President of India and Meerakumari became the first woman Speaker of Loksabha, now SumitraMahajan gracing the chair of Speaker of Lokshabha. Mehbooba Mufti, the Presidentof National Conference. Historical National Congress Party was successfully handled by Soniya Gandhi and Late Jayalalitha handled the regional political party.MamataBanerji and Mayavati have not only been running the political parties but have graced the chair of state's Chief Ministership.

4: WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The emergence of women on the economic scene as entrepreneurs is a significant development in the emancipation of women and securing them a place in the society, which they have all along deserved. Among the states, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka have more women entrepreneurs. One of the most famous female business success stories is the Shri. MahilaGrihaUdyog – LizzatPapad. This is an exclusively women-run organization in which nearly 60000 women are working. In 2006, KiranMuzumdar-Shaw, who started Biocon Ltd. one of India's first biotech companies, was rated India's richest woman. LalitaGupte(ICICI Bank Ltd.) and KalpanaMorparia (CEO of JP Morgan India) were the only business women in India who made the list of the Forbes World's Powerful Women in 2006. The names of some women can be cited as successful entrepreneurs. They are: AkhilaSrinivasan,(Managing Director, Shriram Investment Ltd), Anu Aga (Thermax), Late Padmashree Dr. Chitra Nail (Eminent Educationist and Ex- Chairperson of Indian Institute of Education, Pune) Padmshree Dr. Lila Poonawall (Chairperson of Delaval Pvt. LTdl, Pune), Mrs. VarshaPatil (Chairperson of Kesari Tours and Travels, Pune), ChandaKocchar, (Executive Director, ICICI Bank), EktaKapoor, (Creative Director, Balaji Films), JyotiNayak (President, LizzatPapad), NainalalKidwai (Deputy CEO, HSBC), Preeta Reddy, (M.D. Apollo Hospitals), RenukaRamnath, (CEO, ICICI Ventures), RituBeri(Fashion Designer), Ritu Nanda (CEO, Esco-life), ShahnazHussain (CEO, Shahnaz Herbals). This list is just indicative and not exhaustive.

5: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Though not comparable with USA, where more than 45% of working population is women, in India, the number of working women has been increasing day by day. In India, working women account for 15% of the total urban female population of 150 million, the presence of present day women is found almost in all sectors, be it education, medical, law, space research, engineering, IT, share and commodity broking, business and the like. More working women are found in metro cities than smaller cities. Obviously the ability of earning has reduced financial dependence of women on males be it father, brother, husband or son.

Globalization has indeed raised hopes of women for a better and elevated status arising out of increased chances to work. India is the first among countries to give women equal franchise and has a highly credible record with regard to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interests of women, but women continue to be denied economic, social and legal right and privileges. Though they are considered to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to repression, marginalization and exploitation.

With the advent of media, women have become aware of their own traits, rights and also the work situations. The glass ceilings are shattered and women are flourishing as designers, interior decorators, exporters, publishers, garment manufacturers and still exploring new avenues of economic participation. Women have been proving that they are second to none, be it any field. They are and will always be motivated by the glorious history of above mentioned women and the encouraging statement of ex-prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi who always used to say that *'I never regard myself as a woman, but I am a person with a job.'*