



Women in Economic Development Over the Ages

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ABSTRACT

The world is now transforming and countries are moving from command economies to demand economies. The transformation of the world economies created more opportunities for women who want to own and operate their own businesses. India is a patriarchal society and women are assumed to be economically as well as socially dependent on men. Since times immemorial women are contributing a great deal to the development of any nation across the world. In this paper an attempt has been made to expound the history of economic participation of women from Vedic period to the modern era.

KEYWORDS : Transformation, Women, Business, Economy and Patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION:

Women entrepreneurs are becoming a dynamic force to reckon with in the business world. They are not only involved in business for survival but also to satisfy their innate urge to create and want to establish their capabilities. Educated women are contributing to the social transformation to a great extent and in the future we perceive that more women are venturing into areas that were traditionally dominated by men. The glass ceilings are wrecked and women are indulging in all lines of business activities. The entry of women into business can be seen as an extension of their kitchen activity. Formerly, there were three K's of their involvement, namely, Kitchen, Kids and Knitting. Then it extended to three P's—Pickle, Pappad and Powder and now with a background of education they started shifting from three P's to modern three E's—Energy, Electronics and Engineering.

STATUS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN VEDIC SOCIETY:

It is not new to an Indian woman to take part in the economic activity when we refer to the past history from Vedic period onwards. Apart from giving good citizens to the nation women also have given organisations to the nation. The society of the Vedic Aryans is brought to us through Vedas. Vedic society was a patriarchal society both at family as well as at the structure of societal governance as depicted in Vedas. This led to the degradation of the status of women in family and society. Even in such a state of mind there were some references that indicate equal social and religious status that was available to the boys and girls in Vedic society. Even after marriage, women were allowed to continue their studies. Some women were called "Rishis (Seers)" and some as "Brahmavadinis (Knower of the ultimate)." In this context we can quote the names of "Apala," "Viswavara," "Lopamudra," "Surya Savitri" and "Urvasi." The "Chandogya" and "Buhadaranya" provides women an opportunity to study the Vedas irrespective of the caste to which they belong. Gargi and Maitreyi were the examples.

The marriage during the Vedic period was binding and placed husband and wife on equal footing. We cannot find any traces of the tradition of child marriage during this period. The hymn of marriage in Rigveda clearly stated that the brides were fully matured and grown up at the time of their marriage. The Vedic society, allowed the widows to marry again.

The Vedic society was quite free and never imposed any restrictions on the movement of women. They were educated along with the males and took part in sports and extracurricular activities within the stipulated norms and customs of the society.

The Vedic Aryans were mostly engaged in military activities. Therefore, it became inevitable for the Aryans to rely upon their women for a greater degree of co-operation. While men were engaged in military activities women mostly took part in agriculture and in manufacturing of military weaponry like bows, arrows and others. They were also engaged in weaving cloth, dying, embroidery and basket making. They were also active in teaching profession, independent of their

male counterparts. Women were allowed to enjoy all religious rights and privileges and to acquire Vedic education, to write mantras, to do Vedic sacrifices and Vedic Sanskars. This clearly shows that women status was as high as that of men in the Vedic society. However it started to decline around 500 BC. It still worsened with the Islamic invasion of Babar and the Mogul Empire and with the Christianity, subsequently, Jainism allowed women to get admitted to religious orders through some reform movements. It was in 6th century the practice of childhood marriages was believed to have started.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD:

During the medieval period the position of women further deteriorated. Child marriages continued. Widows were not allowed to remarry. Women were restricted to Zenana areas of the house. Polygamy was practiced by Kshatriyas. Devadasis were sexually exploited.

In spite of all these conditions, there were instances of women who became prominent in the fields of politics, education and religion. Razia Sultana of Delhi, was the only woman monarch of Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati, Chaand Bibi of Ahmadnagar fought battles against the Mogul Emperors. Jehangir's wife Nurjahan, was recognized as Imperial power behind the Mogul throne. Jijabai, mother of Shivaji was recognized for her ability as a warrior and an administrator. Gurunanak preached equality between men and women and advocated that women be allowed to lead religious assemblies.

NEW AGE:

Traditions such as Sati, Jauhar and Devadasis were banned. In the 9th century European scholars observed that Hindu women were naturally chaste and more virtuous than other women.

STATUS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:

At the outset there was no existence of manufacturing entrepreneurship till 1850 due to lack of infrastructural facilities like transportation and communication from the colonial political structure. The promotion of entrepreneurship in India can be attributed to the East India Company and the agency houses. Parsis introduced modern factory system in India from 1850 onwards and dominated the Indian entrepreneurship in the beginning.

The second phase of entrepreneurship started during Second World War. During this phase cement and sugar industries progressed. With the emergence of Gujarati, Marwari and the Vysyas the importance of Parsis started declining. But these people were lacking managerial skills. The entrepreneurial growth got an impetus from the Second World War. Since then the Indian economy has been undergoing a rapid change. The Second World War gave boost to the growth of the industries and entrepreneurs earned maximum profits. Soon after the war the industry sustained losses. During this period, there were hardly any woman entrepreneur and the economic participation of women was almost negligible.

STATUS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:

After independence, the country focussed on industrialization with a specific interest towards large-scale industries in co-ordination with the government. For the first time in the year 1977 industrial policy resolution of the government concentrated on entrepreneurship and directorates of industries were set up in many districts of the country and small and medium enterprises were given importance by allocating industrial area for them. At this stage also there was no significant number of woman entrepreneurs. The representation of women was very low. Only a few women came forward. In reality, they were only nominal heads of the enterprises, but the real business was run by the head of the family, may be father, son or husband.

STATUS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN POST-LIBERLISATION AND GLOBALISATION PERIOD:

The number of woman entrepreneurs increased during 1990s because of liberalisation. The industrial policy resolution of 1991 also gave fillip to woman entrepreneurs. During this period, the participation of woman entrepreneurs in the production activities has increased from 8.25% in 80s to 9.85% in 90 and further risen to 11.29% between 90 and 93 and to 25% in 94-95.

During the post liberalization period most of the women who were engaged in entrepreneurship were only graduates. They did not have training and work experience. Only married women were engaged in entrepreneurship. Most of them started their businesses after attaining 30 years of age. They belonged to extended families.

Due to globalization in 2000, woman participation in economic activity was not casual but professional. Women possessed work experience and they were professionally qualified as well. They came from nuclear families and most of them were married. They started their business at the age of 35.

There was a recession during 2008 and contribution of woman as entrepreneurs after post-recession was commendable. Most of the women are highly educated and techno-savvy. They were fresh from college. They were not married and more particular about pursuing their dreams. These women also came from nuclear families and started their businesses at the age of 25.

Women started working in a wide range of sectors ranging from trade and services to tailoring, beauty parlors, printing etc. But the involvement of woman entrepreneurs in production or manufacturing sector was rather slow. With the advent of globalization new openings have emerged utilizing modern technology to enter new business ventures. To cite a few, computer services, information dissemination, travel and tourism, quality control and testing laboratories, assembly of electronic goods, photography and video shooting, recreation and cultural centers, community kitchens, catering, event management, photo copying, packing and distribution of house hold requirements, health care, laundry, stuffed soft toys, social service etc.

CONCLUSION:

Most of the women have the traits but they do not have a platform to show case their talents. There is a lot of potential available among women, especially the entrepreneurial ability. This potential needs to be explored to its fullest extent in productive and service sectors for economic development of the nation. Today's woman is graduating in professional and technical education to match the market needs. They are proving and establishing themselves to be the best designers, interior decors, publishers, garment manufacturers and are constantly exploring new avenues. It is time for the nation to create support systems to encourage women to take up entrepreneurial activities. It may be of these reasons the government bodies, researchers, international agencies, NGOs and social scientists are showing much interest in the concept of promoting woman entrepreneurship in India.

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