



## Challenges Before Indian Women: Present and Future

### KEYWORDS

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#### Introduction:-

Women in India do not constitute a homogeneous category. Hence, their life situations also differ from one group to the other, one region to the other and one time period to the other. Though the Constitution of India conferred on women equal rights to utilize opportunities in all spheres of public life, and also prohibited any form of gender discrimination, in reality a large number of women continue to suffer from various forms of deprivation. While certain issues are common to all women, there are those that affect only specific groups. It is in this context that challenges before women have to be discussed.

Women constitute 48 percent of the population of India. However, the proportion of women to men is gradually on the decline. The sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) in certain regions of the country has fallen sharply below the national average that stands at 931. In India's rich regions such as Haryana and Punjab sex ratio is as low as 800 females to 1000 males in many districts; this is also true of Maharashtra, Gujarat and the union territory of Delhi. Contrary to the popular notion that wealth and modern education open up mental horizons, the greed for money and the unwillingness of families to share their resources with daughters are manifesting themselves in the form of sex selective abortions resulting in the elimination of female foetuses. This phenomenon described aptly as 'missing millions' is emerging as a serious threat to female survival. Cutting across class barriers, families in different parts of the country are using medical technologies to kill female foetuses by citing dowry related demands as the reason. The threat to survival can perhaps be identified as the first of a series of challenges that women face in contemporary India.

#### Women Education and Economic Conditions

Let us next take education, which holds the key to women's emancipation. While we can truly rejoice at the fact that female literacy which was less than 9 percent when the country became independent has now increased to about 57 percent, the fact that 43 percent are still illiterate is a cause for concern. While government data claim that 96 percent of girl children in the school going age group are enrolled in primary school, the number comes down to 58 percent by the time they reach Grade VIII, and only 38 percent are able to complete Grade XII. This gives a clear indication that at every increased level of education, drop out of girl children also goes on increasing.

Despite rapid economic growth the inability of women to play a part in the Indian economy remains as deep and persistent as ever. The 2011 United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII) which considered factors like labor force participation reproductive health and education, ranked India

depressing 134<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women the right to own property. It wasn't until 2005 that the law was amended to give daughters the same inheritance rights as sons. More over states can enforce their own succession laws, and tribal lands are governed by different laws, So it's hardly a surprise that the 2001 census of India revealed that only 11 percent of agricultures land owners were women. The government recent pledge of \$370 million to start a women's bank is a welcome and major step forward as are recent moves. Through the provision of credit and subsidies, to encourage women to start their own small and medium enterprises. It is a vital moment that needs to be maintained.

On the economic front, the participation of women in the workforce is mostly confined to the unprotected -unorganized sector. Nearly 70 percent of India's female workforce is in this sector. Even women in the formal sector face covert or overt violence both in the work place and in the family, thus busting the myth that economic independence automatically brings emancipation for women.

#### Violence and Health Condition of Women

Violence against women both inside and outside the family is increasing in alarming proportions, despite the law tightening its noose on the perpetrators of violence. Crimes against women such as sex selective abortions, family violence, dowry induced murders, sexual abuse of adolescent girls by relatives and trafficking of girls and women continue to be challenges to their well-being. The warning issued by the National Crime Records Bureau that by 2010, the rate of increase in the incidence of violence against women would be higher than the rate of increase in India's population needs to be taken serious note of.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by remarkable strides achieved in India's health sector. Yet, nearly half of India's female population is anemic. About 40 percent of those affected by HIV/AIDS, one of this century's grave challenges are women. Even today maternal mortality stands at 500 per 1, 00,000 live births. One of our daunting challenges lies in giving women knowledge of their reproductive rights and creating an environment in which they can take informed decisions about their lives.

#### In political Power

The term political participation has a very wide meaning, It is not only related to right to vote, but simultaneously relates to participation in; decision making process, political activism political consciousness etc.

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general election was 65.63% compared to 67.09% turnout for men.

India ranks 20<sup>th</sup> from the bottom to in terms of representation of women in parliament.

Though the Constitution of India removed all hurdles to the achievement of gender equality, six decades ago, and women played such a pivotal-role in the freedom struggle, the participation of women in governance in the world's largest democracy is negligible. While women's representation in Parliament is only about 10 percent, their share in state assemblies is not even 7 percent. As long as women do not get an opportunity to participate in the country's governance on par with men, issues that affect women's lives will not come center stage. The fact that the Women's Reservation Bill aimed at giving 33 percent reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies has not received assent even 14 years after it was proposed only shows the gender insensitive mind of those who refuse to accept the redistribution of political power.

The dawn of the new millennium saw some of the long drawn struggles for gender justice ending on a positive note. In spite of the gaps, the passage of the Domestic Violence Act and the Amendment to the Hindu Succession Act conferring on women equal rights to ancestral property gave teeth to women fighting for their rights and identities. The Bill relating to Sexual Harassment at Workplace is around the corner. However, lowpercentage cannot change social realities if women themselves do not exhibit the courage to challenge gender-based discrimination that is inherent in all social institutions. Our exclusive dependence on the state as the justice delivery mechanism must stop, and a greater responsibility be placed on civil society institutions. Women must decide to take their life in their own hands and not allow patriarchal social-political and cultural forces to direct the course of things for them.

### Conclusion

While we must admit that there are more opportunities for women's emancipation today than ever before, we must remember that women do not constitute a homogenous category. There are marked differences between women in rural and urban regions and women in different social classes. The real challenge lies in reducing these gaps and giving all women their rightful spaces in society.

In the years to come women must learn to challenge such forces as religious fundamentalism, and gender unequal relations in family and other social institutions. As women try to cross old barriers, new blockades may be placed their way because patriarchal ideologies do not easily give way to the creation of a gender just social order. However, under the leadership of a very vibrant women's movement that has successfully challenged many gender prejudices that were enter changed in the social mindset the struggle for gender equity is bound to continue.

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