Original Research Paper

Volume - 14 | Issue - 12 | December - 2024 | PRINT ISSN No. 2249 - 555X | DOI : 10.36106/ijar

Economics

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT The role of women in India's economy is crucial, as women contribute significantly to various sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, and entrepreneurship. Despite their substantial participation, gender inequality and social barriers continue to affect women's full potential in economic development. This research paper explores the role of women in India's economy, their contributions, challenges, and policies aimed at enhancing their participation. It also examines data trends in women's employment, entrepreneurship, and education in the context of India's economic growth.

KEYWORDS : Women's Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Women in India constitute nearly 48% of the total population and contribute significantly to the labor force and overall economic development. Over the years, the role of women has evolved, with increasing participation in agriculture, industry, services, and entrepreneurship. However, the impact of gender inequality remains a key challenge. Women's labor force participation has been lower compared to men, and they often face challenges such as wage disparity, lack of access to education and health, and limited decision-making power.

This paper aims to analyze the economic role of women in India, evaluate their contributions to various sectors, and identify the challenges they face. It also provides insights into the various policies and programs introduced by the government to empower women and boost their participation in the economy.

2. Women's Contribution to Key Sectors in India:-

2.1. Agriculture

Women play a crucial role in India's agricultural sector. Approximately 60-70% of women in rural India are engaged in agriculture, which includes crop production, livestock management, and post-harvest activities. Women are often responsible for the production of food crops, managing family farms, and ensuring food security in rural households. According to the Economic Survey of India 2023, women contribute about 50% of the total agricultural labor force in India.

2.2. Manufacturing and Industry

In the manufacturing sector, women are employed in industries such as textiles, garments, food processing, and chemical production. Women in industrial labor often work in informal and low-wage sectors, but the participation rate is growing as more women enter urban areas seeking employment opportunities. The Make in India initiative, which aims to promote manufacturing and entrepreneurship, is expected to increase the employment of women in this sector.

2.3. Services and Technology

India's services sector, including IT, education, healthcare, and financial services, has seen a growing participation of women. Women comprise 30-35% of the workforce in the Information Technology (IT) sector, which is a significant contributor to India's GDP. In healthcare and education, women contribute significantly to the workforce, especially in teaching, nursing, and administrative roles. The services sector is expected to see continued growth in women's participation, particularly in higher education, financial services, and online platforms.

2.4. Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship is a growing segment in India, with more women venturing into businesses, especially in sectors like fashion, healthcare, food processing, and technology startups. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2023 report, women represent 14% of total entrepreneurs in India, a number that is steadily increasing as more women access financing and government support. However, challenges such as limited access to capital, social and family pressures, and legal hurdles remain.

Table 1: Women's Labor Force Participation Rate in Key Sectors (2023, %)

Sector	Women's Participation (%)
Agriculture	60-70%
Manufacturing	30%
Services (IT, Healthcare, etc.)	35%
Entrepreneurship	14%

The highest concentration of female labor force participation is seen in the agriculture sector, where women play a crucial role in farm labor. However, women's participation in the manufacturing sector and entrepreneurship remains limited but is gradually increasing.

Table 2: Gender Pay Gap Across Sectors in India (2023, %)

Sector	Gender Pay Gap (%)
Agriculture	18%
IT and Technology	25%
Manufacturing	30%
Financial Services	27%

The gender pay gap is particularly pronounced in the manufacturing and IT sectors, where women earn significantly less than men for similar work. This highlights the persistent challenges women face in obtaining equal pay for equal work.

3. Challenges Faced by Women in the Indian Economy:-

3.1. Gender Pay Gap

One of the major challenges for women in India's economy is the gender pay gap. On average, women earn approximately 20-30% less than men for similar work. The gender pay gap is most significant in sectors such as manufacturing, technology, and finance. The International Lab our Organization (ILO) estimates that women's pay in India is 34% lower than men's.

3.2. Education and Skill Development

Although female literacy rates have improved, with 70% of women being literate in 2023, access to quality education and vocational training remains limited in many rural areas. A significant portion of women, especially in rural regions, still faces barriers to pursuing higher education, limiting their participation in skilled jobs and industries. Skill development programs for women have been initiated, but challenges remain in bridging the skill gap between men and women.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Barriers

Socio-cultural norms and gender roles often limit women's economic participation. In many rural areas, women are expected to fulfill a domestic duty, which reduces their ability to participate in the formal workforce. Additionally, discrimination and sexual harassment in workplaces often discourage women from seeking employment or career advancement.

3.4. Access to Financial Resources

While the Indian government has taken steps to improve women's access to financial resources through initiatives such as MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) loans and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, women, especially in rural areas, still face significant barriers to accessing credit and financial services. Without proper financial inclusion, women's ability to start and scale businesses is limited.

4. Government Initiatives and Policies for Women Empowerment:-

4.1. Women's Reservation Bill

One of the key legislative measures aimed at empowering women in India is the Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve 33% of seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women. The bill aims to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making.

4.2. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana

This initiative focuses on improving the welfare of girls by promoting education and gender equality. It has been successful in raising awareness about the importance of educating the girl child and reducing female feticide in several states.

4.3. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

This initiative aims to provide free LPG connections to poor women from rural areas, thereby empowering women by reducing their dependence on firewood and improving their health and economic well-being.

4.4. MUDRA Yojana and Stand-Up India Scheme

Both of these initiatives provide financial support to women entrepreneurs. The MUDRA Yojana provides micro-financing options for small and medium businesses, while the Stand-Up India Scheme promotes entrepreneurship among women, especially in rural and underserved areas.

5. CONCLUSION

The role of women in India's economy is pivotal to the country's growth and development. While women contribute significantly to agriculture, manufacturing, services, and entrepreneurship, their potential is often hindered by systemic barriers such as gender pay gaps, limited access to education and finance, and cultural constraints. However, India has implemented several progressive policies aimed at improving women's participation in the economy, and these efforts are showing positive results. To achieve greater gender parity, there is a need for continued focus on improving access to education, skill development, financial inclusion, and eliminating workplace discrimination.

The future of India's economy depends on harnessing the full potential of its female workforce, ensuring equal opportunities, and empowering women in all sectors of society.

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