

## **Impact of Economic Development on Status of Women: An Analysis for India**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper intends to analyze the impact of Economic Development on the status of women in India and tries to study how historical perceptions, prejudices, predispositions and beliefs regarding women in society have led to perpetuation of 'deprivation and discrimination' against the women and in result deteriorating the overall status of women even in today's world. For any economy, growth relates to an increase in per capita income which reflects only "quantitative aspect" in disregard of distributive justice in that economy. Economic development, on the other hand, is a wider concept pertaining not only to the quantitative aspect but also qualitative aspect of distribution of income and income inequity in respect of its distribution among the population and also other socio-economic factors as well, hence it is also referred as a "multi-dimensional concept" including not only increase in per capita income but also improvement in living standards, educational attainment of people, alleviation of poverty, health conditions and nutritional status, status of women and their empowerment etc. This paper focuses on the status of women and their empowerment along the path of economic development in India and suggests some possible channels as also remedial measures that can lead to or help to uplift the status of women.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Economic development, discrimination, women empowerment, education, employment.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Economic Development being a multi-dimensional concept relates to development in all socio-economic sectors of an economy and it also touches upon the issue of women empowerment. In most developing and under developing countries across the world, status of women in past has always been at a lower bench though many continuous efforts have been taken so far by governmental and non-governmental organizations still there remains a long distance to be covered in equalizing the status of men and women in every societal structure. Economist Esther Duflo stated in one of his papers, 'women empowerment and economic development are closely related'. Women empowerment can alone contribute significantly to economic development in a developing country like India where 48.47% of the population is female population (Census 2011). On the other hand, economic development can also uplift the status of women since the effects development will trickle down to each and every individual eventually. Therefore, one might conclude that there is an existence of a two-way relationship between economic development and women empowerment. In India, where almost half of the population comprises of female population and population growth rate for females being 18.12% and that for males being 17.19% which is lower than that for females for the period of 2001-2011, it becomes extremely important to empower women in all respects as in future, given the current statistics, India will definitely have a higher proportion of females than males in its entire population. This suggests that future growth prospects for India are quite dependent on its female population, thus for ensuring better opportunities for growth in coming decades, we need to first secure "interests" of women rather try hard to enhance their contribution and capability in all spheres of socio-economic world. Thus, it is imperative that our society empower women by ensuring equal opportunity and equal treatment what is not only just available to them but also availed by them in all spheres of social, political, administrative and economic world.

### **II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON STATUS OF WOMEN**

In every era from the past, there has been existence of distinction on the basis of male and female gender with reference to prevalent socio-cultural norms/customs as also biological distinctiveness. But this distinction over time has led to oppression of women by males and women were considered to be a subordinate/second class. In ancient and medieval times, hunting, gathering, climbing and cutting down trees etc. for food and shelter were necessary for sustaining life. These activities required a good amount of physical strength and women being biologically relatively weaker than men kept themselves away from these strength-demanding and exertion-causing activities. This eventually resulted into a social system in which women had taken up secondary roles in society and got trapped into domestic work only within the four corners of the home. Also men started feeling his superiority over women and thus began to enslave and control women. This

ideology pertaining to men's superiority and oppression of women is termed as patriarchy. There are evidences for patriarchy prevalence in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> in Europe. Section 2.1 discusses the ideology of patriarchy in detail. Though women were physically less strong than men on natural grounds but mentally they are equally capable and endowed. therefore, oppressing women cannot be justified on grounds of any norm, religious belief or ideology and as such there has been a consistent fight/struggle against patriarchy by women especially in Western European countries so as to emancipate the women from these prejudices and accord them free, fair, just and equal status and opportunity to grow and develop personality as human being and live a life of equal partner with respect and dignity as enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. This gave rise to the concept of feminism which simply aims at equalizing the status of women as that of the men in the society. Section 2.2 discusses different approaches that are adopted by feminist people to uplift the status of women and for their emancipation/liberation from the shackles of deep-rooted preconceived notions.

### **1.1 Patriarchy**

'Patriarchy' refers to uneven distribution of power and control in favour of men and hence resulting into dominance of men over women. These powers can be defined in terms of social, political, administrative, household, or economic powers of decision making and controlling other people. Many people have defined patriarchy differently like anthropologists have defined patriarchy as a system in which men dominates the political affairs in the society.

Patriarchy has been prevailing since centuries as it an ideology that controls the environment and mind set of people and thus it is getting transferred from one generation to another and one century to another. Since, people learn from and behave in accordance to the environment around them and this fact contributes to continuing existence of patriarchy in perpetuity. In earlier times, patriarchy used to influence people through architecture, religious beliefs, literature etc. The Bible, in Christianity, states that every woman should be "submissive" to men and in Manusmriti it has been stated that every woman should treat her husband as God. This clearly shows "how different religious beliefs are subordinating women to some extent and giving men's a superior place in the society". But in modern times, patriarchy is being perpetuated through new means like television, radio, newspaper, internet etc. to control people's mind.

### **1.2 Feminism**

The concept of 'feminism' represents an integrated challenge against oppression of women by men. Feminists are a group of people who all have united for achieving a common goal of empowering women and equalizing their status to that of the men in every society. Different feminist groups have different ideologies but they all have common goal of elevation of women status and to strive for removal of discriminatory practices associated with the religious beliefs and rituals. Liberal Feminism believes in the fact that God has created everyone as equal human beings therefore everyone deserves equal rights and equal treatment. Marxist Feminism attempts to uplift status of women based on the concept of what kind of roles are to be played by men and women in production process. It has been found that women have played a second class role and men usually captured first class roles or powerful positions in various production processes. Thus, Marxist Feminists are trying to uplift status of women at workplace. Socialist Feminism attempts to uplift status of women based on the concept of value of goods that are produced by men and women in production process. It has been found that the value of goods produced by women is too low relative to that of produced by men. This can be attributed to the fact that women were secluded to only domestic work and men worked outside the house and produced a much higher value of goods and services. Finally, Radical Feminism tries to uplift the status of women by improving their political status. So all these different ideologies of feminism have been consistently trying to empower women and have come a long way ahead but still have not gained complete success in achieving their goal of egalitarianism as "social changes are gradual, incremental and slow". Issues like government repression and apathy, lack of funding for ameliorative programs for women welfare or lack of support by women themselves etc. are major impediments in the path of their success as being equal in society.

## **III. ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

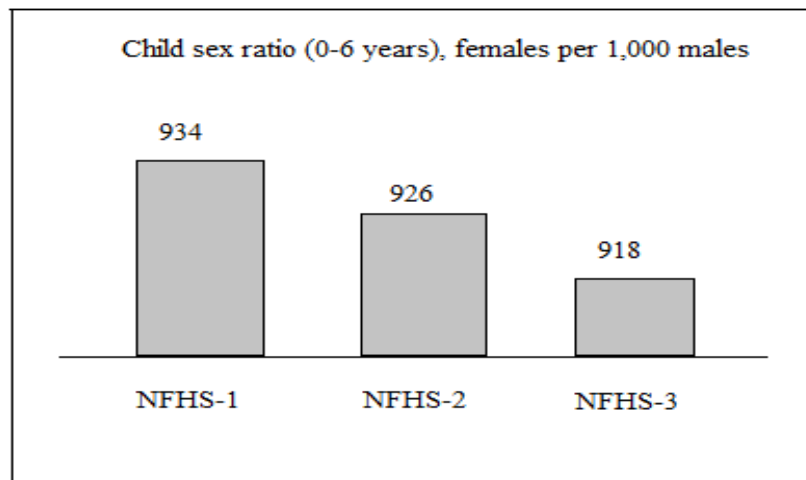
Patriarchy, religious beliefs and social norms have precluded women from enjoying equal status and rights in society as discussed in section 2. Women in India, before independence and even after independence have faced oppression, repression, suppression, discrimination and preclusion from having equal rights in almost all socio-economic spheres. Women in India have always been powerless, oppressed, subordinated, put at lower status, victims of patriarchy, suppressed by poverty, deprived from adequate food and nutrition, deprived from education etc. Also statistical data from most surveys depicts prevalence of gender inequality in India in terms sex ratios, educational attainment, nutrition and demographic outcomes.

Economic Development that has taken place in India in past few decades in terms of educational attainment, improvement in life expectancy, increase in per capita income etc. definitely have an impact on status of women. One would expect that as the effects of development trickle down to every sphere of economy and status of women would get uplifted and the issue of unfavorable child sex ratio, lack of health and nutrition and lack educational attainment will get resolved on its own yet the need is to initiate a concerted action of social awareness through media for the women as human being and an equal one so as raise the status of women. Following sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 discusses the impact of economic development on child sex ratio, educational attainment of women and health and nutritional status in India in past two decades.

### 3.1 Economic Development and Child Sex Ratio

National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) indicates presence of gender inequality in India in all three rounds of its survey – NFHS-1 (1992-93), NFHS-2 (1998-99) and NFHS-3 (2005-06). One of the most powerful indicators of gender inequality is adult sex ratio and child sex ratio. Sex ratio is defined as number of females per 1,000 of males and child sex ratio is defined as number of females per 1,000 of males in 0-6 years of age. Trend based on the three NFHS reports provides a strong evidence for decline in child sex ratio in India. Figure 1 shows the decline in female population per 1,000 of male population in 0-6 years of age in India for the three NFHS rounds. Child sex ratio for NFHS-1 (1992-93) is 934 females per 1,000 of males in 0-6 years of age, for NFHS-2 (1998-99) it declines to 926 and for NFHS-3 (2005-06) it further declines to 918.

FIGURE 1



The possible causes that can explain this decline in child sex ratio over the three NFHS rounds are increase in access to and use of technologies that enable sex selection rather determination before birth and female foeticide and increase in girl child mortality either due to natural reasons or due to discrimination against girl child by precluding them from having a healthy and nutritious diet especially in rural India. This shows preference of son and subordination of girl child in India.

Census data for year 2001 and 2011 on child sex ratio also depicts the same trend. Figure 2 shows the decline in female population per 1,000 of male population in 0-6 years of age in India for the year 2001 and 2011. Child sex ratio for Census, 2001 is 927 females per 1,000 of males in 0-6 years of age and it declined to 914 for Census, 2011.

FIGURE 2



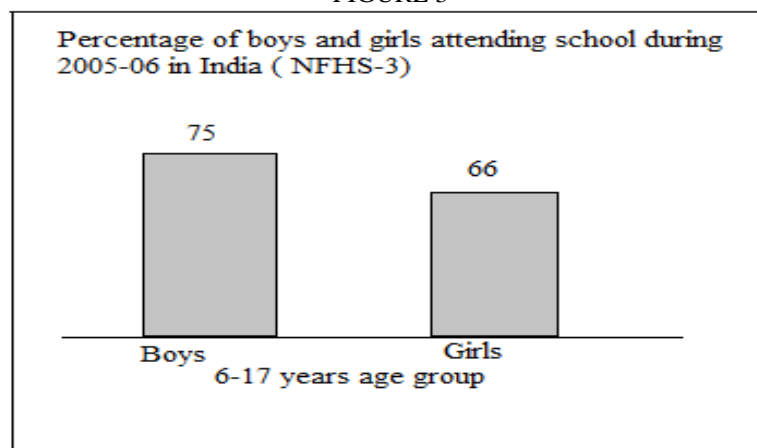
NFHS and Census data both show a decline in child sex ratio in past two decades in India. With economic development, one would expect an increase in percentage of women with higher number of years of education and an increase in overall wealth levels of households so that their access to better health and nutrition is improved. In respect of child sex ratio, one would expect that child sex ratio to improve with years of education of mother. But contrary to this, NFHS-3 (2005-06) data shows that child sex ratio declines with an increase in years of education of mother. This trend is explained by the fact that as women become more educated with development of economy “their access to and knowledge about technologies like ultrasound also improves” and this puts an adverse impact on child sex ratio and more educated women have disproportionately more sons than daughters by the application of techniques of pre-natal sex determination. According to NFHS-3, with an increase in wealth quintile of household, there has been a significant adverse effect on child sex ratio. The states having most unfavorable child sex ratio are Haryana and Punjab with only 830 and 846 females per 1,000 of males in 0-6 years of age respectively. Thus, in India, development has further added to the problem of missing women by resulting into a significant decline in child sex ratio.

### 3.2 Economic Development and Educational Attainment of Women

Education and educational attainment are perceived as key elements for removing gender inequality and empowering women. Many countries across the world have adopted the path of educating women to achieve the goal of gender equality. Census data for India shows that 75.26% of males and 53.67% of females were literate in 2001. This percentage increased to 82.14% for males and 65.46% for females in 2011. These figures clearly indicate that there is a significant increase in literacy among females.

NFHS-3 (2005-06) studied the trend in school attendance of boys and girls with age and also analyzes the effect of household wealth and educational attainment of household head on school attendance. Figure 3 shows the disparity in boys and girls in terms of their school attendance. During NFHS-3, 75% of boys and 66% of girls were attending schools in age group of 6-17 years.

FIGURE 3



NFHS-3 also shows that gender disparity in school attendance is mainly a rural phenomenon. Figure 4 and 5 clearly indicate that gender inequality seen in figure 3 is mainly driven by rural gender disparity in school attendance among boys and girls in the age group of 6-17 years.

FIGURE 4

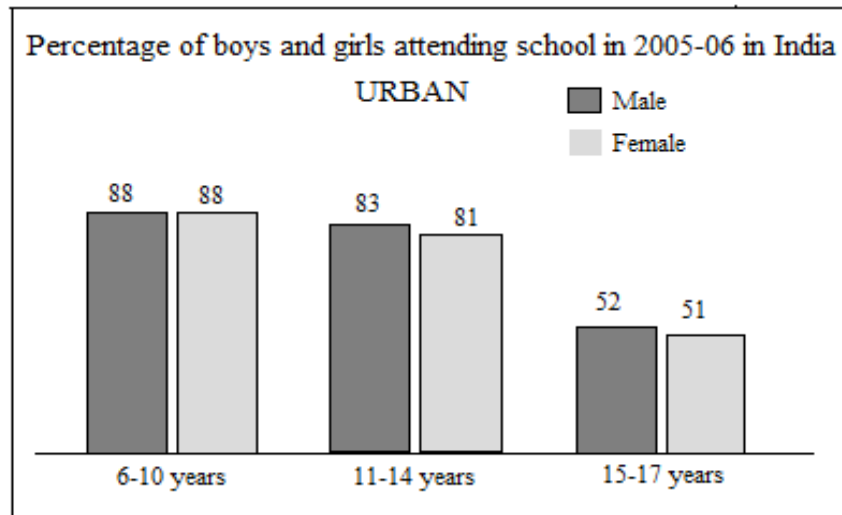
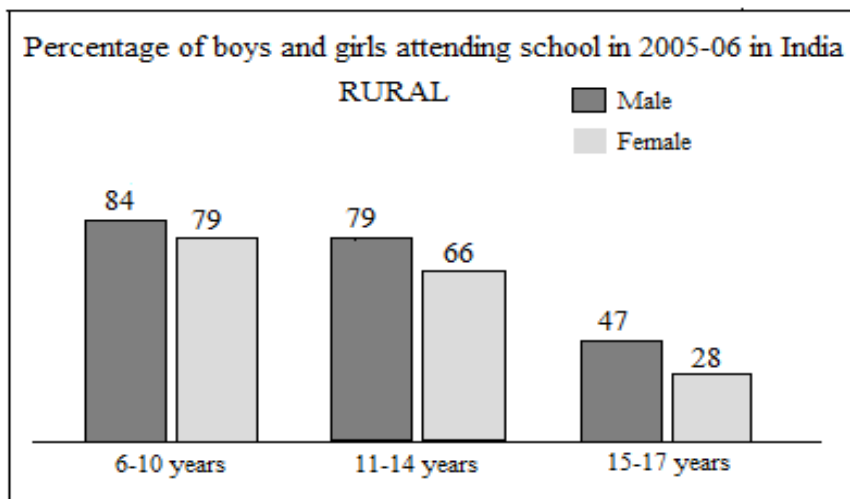


FIGURE 5



NFHS-3 finds an increase in school attendance at all ages for both boys and girls with an increase in educational attainment of the household head. It was found that 52.9% of girls and 64.9% of boys attended schools when household head no education but this percentage rose to 88.8% for girls and 91.8% for boys when household head had more than twelve years of education. Gender differentials in school attendance also declined with an increase in education of household head. In respect to wealth of household, it was found that 49.7% of girls and 62.6% of boys attended schools when household belonged to lowest wealth quintile but this percentage rose to 87.4% for girls and 89.6% for boys when household belonged to highest wealth quintile. Gender differentials in school attendance also declined with an increase in wealth quintile of household. This trend shows that 'economic development in educational sector' has been so far successful in eliminating gender disparity and thus empowering women. Also increase in school attendance for girls and thus, literacy rate for females will facilitate economic independence of women by increasing employment opportunities for them. Getting employment can be treated as gaining financial independence and decision making power especially in a country like India where females were oppressed and subordinated mainly because of the lower value associated with the kind of work, usually domestic household activities, they do. Therefore, women employment is a major channel for empowering women in India.

### **3.3 Economic Development, Health And Nutritional Status Of Women**

Girl child, in past, have deprived from having equal access to adequate nutrition and thus a healthy life. All three rounds of NFHS, depicts that percentage of female children in age 12-23 months who are fully immunized is lower than that for male children. 37% of male children and 34% of female children in 12-23 months age were fully immunized in NFHS-1, 40% of male children and 38% of female children in 12-23 months age were fully immunized in NFHS-2 and 45% of male children and 42% of female children in 12-23 months age were fully immunized in NFHS-3. Though there is an upward trend in rates of immunization yet there is a consistent prevalence of gender disparity in all three rounds of NFHS.

Empowering women by educating them has shown a favorable impact on rates of immunization as well as on gender differential. It has been found that rates of full immunization increases with mothers' education and also female child benefits more from an increase in education of mother than male child. This leads to a decline in gender disparity in terms of immunization and thus ensures a healthy life for female child too. Improving health outcomes for women is one of the important ways to improve their status in society.

A lower status of women, in past, has also resulted into a low body mass index (BMI) for women in India. BMI is derived from ratio of weight and height of an individual. It has been accepted that a BMI < 18.5 indicates chronic energy deficiency in males. NFHS-3 shows that 36% of women and 34% of men in age group 15-49 have a BMI < 18.5. It indicates that prevalence of chronic energy deficiency and lack of proper nutrition is more among women than men.

Economic Development ensuring a rise in educational attainment of women and greater employment opportunities will result into a rise in BMI for women. NFHS reports states that a rise in educational attainment, wealth, employment and decision making power for women results into an increase in BMI for women.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

The major conclusion and inferences from this paper highlights that there is a positive correlation between economic development and the elevation of status of women especially when there is equity in distributive processes in the economy. Though economic development has contributed significantly to the upliftment of women in India yet there exists a wide gap particularly in rural India that has to be bridged by effective strategies so as to achieve equality in status of men and women.

Patriarchy, religious beliefs, social norms and customs and traditions intensely held in society as a dominant culture over centuries perpetuated a conglomerative culture of discrimination, deprivation, degradation and debasement of womanhood which has regressive effect on the status of women in India in contrast with the feminism and women liberation movements striving hard to effect fundamental and crucial changes in the status of women by adopting slew of strategies for the ultimate goal of equality of status and of opportunity for the women. Always and all the time there is a light at the end of the tunnel, the task of women upliftment and emancipation though arduous and difficult yet not impossible. The efforts of our constitution makers to accord preferential treatment to women and children further supported by effective government policies geared to accord due entitlements to women and also other economic programs including various legislations will have desirable effect in according equal status and equal treatment and further ameliorate the status of women in India.

Our analysis in Section 3.1 shows that child sex ratio has become more unfavourable over a period of past two decades despite the fact that the effects of economic development were trickling down to almost all the spheres of economy. This trend observed in child sex ratio in India can be attributed to social factors and rigid mentality of people rather than economic factors. As discussed in Section 3.2, literacy rate among females has increased significantly from 53.67% in 2001 to 65.46% in 2011. This increase in literacy rate can be attributed to the policies that have been implemented by government to ensure and secure rights of women along with the process of economic development. Section 3.3 discussed that full immunization rate in female child and BMI for adult females is lower than that for males. This trend can be explained in terms of historical perceptions and culture that considered females to be of subordinate class and thus led to deprivation of females in terms of food, nutrition and health. Though we have come a long way ahead in fighting this issue yet complete success is still not achieved. Thus, this paper concludes that women "education and employment" are key factors for women's emancipation, enrichment and enlightenment and seem to be indispensable entitlements as a matter of right for the women so as to provide appropriate status to women in India.

In conclusion the Economic independence of women through employment in various occupations will have definite advancement and empowerment of women and will also result in increase in their life expectancy, better health, higher standard of living and a participative role in decision making processes. Thus, the higher the economic development the more will be the economic independence of women due to active participation (employment) in production processes and economic activities resultantly, the more will be the contribution/share of women in national wealth creation, the better would be the status of women and greater the freedom the women will acquire and enjoy the life.

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