

# A Historical Analysis of Women Development in India

Seema

Research Scholar, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, India

**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the issue of women development in Indian society. A large number of policies, programmers and projects are designed to raise the status of women in development process. Women development is considered as a part of national development by Indian government. In India from first five year plan to fifth five year plans, Indian planners were concerned with helping women to fulfill their domestic roles in a more efficient way. From second plan onwards to the sixth plan women's welfare became a sub-heading under social welfare. In India so many schemes will start for empowering women's in terms of social and economic condition. Our government takes so many initiatives for the development of women.*

**Keywords:** Development, five year plan, society reform, status of women.

## 1. Introduction

Development is a process that signifies a state of evolvement, maturity, completeness, improvement and positive change transiting to a desirable higher level of quality of life, as we know, women have the subordinate status and position in the gender relationship, and therefore they experience social structural inequalities and injustices in their everyday lives. This is the reason that women are given special treatment in the development process and women's development becomes the prime concern in policies and programmers. It helps the women to strengthen their capacities and overcome the barriers experienced by them because of their sex. A large number of policies, programmers and projects are designed to raise the status of women in development process. The women and development perspective looks at women in process and focuses on relations between men and women. It recognizes both the productive and reproductive contributions of women to the society.

Swami Vivekananda, a spiritual leader and great social reformer has said about the importance of women development long times ago that....

*“There is no chance for welfare of world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”.*

It is therefore necessary to first understand the approaches for women development, the different policies and then find out how far they are appropriate for their development.

## 2. Objective of the Study

- To identify the role of women thought the time.
- To analysis the government efforts for improving the women status at present time.
- To identify the changing role of women from ancient society to modern society.

## 3. Historical Women Development

Traditionally India had seen a woman as a member of the family or a group and not as an individual with an identity or right of her own. The principle of equality of women and men has been basic to traditional Indian thinking and the Hindu religious philosophy. The story of Indian women is best conceptualized in terms of India's ancient history and mythology going back about 4000 years. In modern times, its subjugation as a colony and regeneration since 1945 as a free and democratic secular country.

Historically Indian women are equal to men. The concept of woman as Shakti, the primal energy force, finds expression in the famous epic MAHABARATHA. In this epic woman is glorified as a “light of the house, mother of the universe and supporter of the earth and all its forests”. The Mahabharata further says that there is no guru like the mother. In earlier Vedic, age a woman held higher and honored situation in gender relationship. Manu in his MANUSMRITI, who was the first to codify the laws in India, also write about this, “Where women are verily honored, there the gods rejoice, where, however, they are not honored, there all sacred rites prove useless”.

In another epic RAMAYANA, when Rama intended to perform the Ashwamedha Yajana in the absence of Sita, the religious norms advised Rama to keep a golden status of his wife beside him during the ceremony. These epics through ages have become benchmark with which status of women is compared. While making comparison it is always said that as women participate equally along with men in the religious rituals so woman are equal to men.

The most important issues that formed the base of social reforms during the freedom struggle were the abolition of sati, widow remarriages, and restraint on child marriages and women's education. Thus, history tells us that the freedom struggle that interwoven around the question of gender equality, free India incorporated this principle in the constitution in 1950.

The term 'development' assumes a greater significance in the specific context of woman with the secondary position at all levels, in spite of her inherent strengths and capabilities. It signifies a state of evolvement, maturity completeness, improvement and positive change transiting to a desirable higher level of quality of life. Women's development can become a reality only when an environment is created which will influence her thinking and life style to evolve as an improved personality.

Following is the evidence on the gains from investing in women development:

- Investing in girl's education brings return down the road for the girls themselves by boosting their earnings, increasing their options in the labor market, and reducing the health risks and risk of dying associated with pregnancy and childbirth.
- Of all health care spending for adults, improving health care for women 15 to 44 years old offers biggest return; six of the ten main causes of illness for this age-group of women can be prevented or treated for less than 5000 per year of healthy life gained; for men, the same amount of spending would prevent or treat only three of the ten main causes of illness.

#### 4. For the development of Women in India

Each five year plan devotes a special section on the schemes and projects designed especially for women. Reservation of 33% seats was made in all elected offices of the local bodies in rural and urban areas. The introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the constitution ensures women's participation in politics, at least at the level of grass root democracy. It is an enabling provision for ensuring equity and justice.

- Education, health and women's welfare were identified three major areas for women's development. The focus is to provide welfare services and opportunities such as education, health, and maternity and child welfare to women.
- India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights for women. Key among them is the,
- Ratification of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW-1979) in 1993. The convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life- including the right to vote and to stand for election-as well as education, health and employment and making women's rights as human rights.

### 5. Women Development in India

#### 5.1 Five- Year Plans

In the first twenty years of planning and development, women's concerns in state policies were mainly driven under welfare approach considering that motherhood and child rearing is the most important and significant role of women. With regard to women, following factors influenced the overall approach: 1) the objectives of economic growth were given precedence over objectives of social transformation. 2) Gender inequalities and subordination of women were not viewed as problems requiring attention and remedial measures and 3) Promotion of women's domestic duties as their legitimate and desired role.

##### 5.1.1 First Five-Year Plan (1951-56)

For women's development voluntary social welfare board at the centre and in the states were set up. Major indicatives are:

- To support enrolment and mobilization of girls in schools at the primary level and at the university stage, emphasize was on vocational education, to take up employment immediately
- To make efforts of education so that women become better mothers and manage their household in an economical and efficient manner.
- To encourage training of women doctors, midwives and dais to provide better childbirth and health services for women.
- To develop the employability of women through technical training

##### 5.1.2 Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61)

This duration did not enunciate any new goals of development for women. However, stress was:

- To promote girl's education through parents and to make education more relevant to girl's needs and employment of women teachers
- To improve maternal and child health but the emphasis was more on children.
- To take care of women's physical and biological disabilities at the work place while allotting types of work in the field of labor.

##### 5.1.3 Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66)

This plan continued to lay emphasis on the welfare aspect of women. Increased allocation for the central social welfare board, which was the main instrument of state activity, was also recommended. Increased assistance to voluntary organizations working in this field was encouraged. Approach of women development during third plan was:

- To link health, the maternal and child welfare services with the general health facilities and referral institutions.
- To encourage family planning by adoption of the oral pill, a relatively new method of family planning at that time.

#### **5.1.4 Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74) and Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79)**

No new initiatives were indicated. The policy parameters continued to stress on an approach, through the social welfare board, of assisting voluntary organizations dealing with the welfare of women.

#### **5.1.5 Sixth Five-Year Plan (1974-79)**

It stressed that the main strategy for women's development in the previous plans was three-fold-education, employment and health. Approach to women development during Sixth Five Year Plan was:

- To increase enrolment of girls at the elementary level, promotion of functional literacy and encouraging the promotion of education for women in backward areas and
- To improve health and family welfare, maternal and child welfare services and attention was paid to women's nutrition needs.
- To generate more skilled and unskilled employment through vocational training and support services. However, on agriculture and industry side no new schemes for the employment of women were made however, integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched.

#### **5.1.6 Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-90)**

The Seventh Five Year Plan (1986-1991) targeted concepts of equity and empowerment propagated globally by the United Nations Decade for women it emphasized.

- To empower women by generating awareness of their rights and privileges.
- To train women for more productive economic activity.
- To develop support services to reduce the excessive daily burden of domestic work on women.
- To enhance women's access to science and technology to promote their participation in creation of a sustainable environment.
- To promote women's corporations for every state with the centre and state governments participation, at 50:50 funding.
- The plan further commented upon the implementation of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) programme.

#### **5.1.7 Eighth Five –Year Plan (1992-97)**

The Department of Women and Child Development also prepared a plan of action for women for 1989-2000 and set

up the Shram Shakti commission for evaluating the functioning of women in the informal sector and for suggesting steps for ameliorating their condition.

#### **5.1.8 India's Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002)**

'Empowerment of Women' being one of the primary objectives of the ninth plan, every effort will be made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners, along with men. This will be realized through early finalization and adoption of the 'national policy for empowerment of women' which laid down definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions along with a well-defined gender development index to monitor the impact of its implementation in raising the status of women from time to time.

#### **5.1.9 Approach paper to the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2000-07)**

It also includes the expansion of economic and social opportunities for all individuals and groups, reduction in disparities and a greater participation in the decision making process.

#### **5.1.10 Monitor able Targets for the Tenth Plan and beyond**

- All children in school by 2003, all children to complete 5 years of schooling by 2007.
- Increase in literacy rate to 75% within the plan period.
- Reduction of infant mortality rate (IMR) to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 28 by 2012.
- Reduction of maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and 1 by 2012.
- Increase in forest and tree cover to 25% by 2007 and 33% by 2012.
- All villages to have sustained access to potable drinking water within the plan period.

#### **5.1.11 Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012)**

In the eleventh plan, for the first time, women are recognized not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that interventions in favour of women must be multi-pronged and they must be : 1) provide women with basic entitlements, 2) address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment, 3) ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women (VAW)- physical, economic, social, psychological etc.

## 6. Social, Political and Economic Empowerment of women in India

### 6.1 Women's Development Schemes

Since independence, numbers of schemes have been launched to promote welfare and development of women in India. Although there have been various shifts in policy approaches in the last fifty years from the concept of 'welfare' till the '70' s to 'development' in the '80' s and now to 'empowerment' in the '90' s, the department of women and child development has been implementing special programmers designed to improve the socioeconomic status of women.

### 6.2 Economic Empowerment

Economic status of women has definitely improved after joining the SHGs. The swayamsidha group members have been able to further strengthen their own economic activities as individuals and as groups by taking loans from their own kitty and from the banks and other credit institutions. This has generated enthusiasm and self-confidence in women in the swayamsidha SHGs who become role models for other women in the village to emulate. The result is that once one or two groups get formed, there is a chain reaction and other groups come up. These women handle their own money; keep their own account in the banks with photographs of their office bearers. (Annual Report 2007-2008. Programmes for Women)

### 6.3 Social Empowerment

Awareness on various social issues has also been created among women. Under the convergence component of scheme, they are now being made familiar with various developmental schemes of several departments which benefit women. Women now always enjoy relatively more freedom and there are no restrictions on their movement outside home for social or business purpose. Being part of the swayamsidha group has given them enhanced status. After joining SHGs, the women members are increasingly participating in family decision making, demanding their rights from family, community and government. They have developed the ability to interact with others and have developed negotiation skills.

### 6.4 Political Empowerment

Politically women are active. Thus whoever gets time participate in Gram Sabha activities. The participation of women in local self-government has increased. The percentage of women's voting has gone up considerably. The members are now more sensitive about political issues and their impact on their lives. Participation of women at panchayati levels has increased and some of them have been elected to the panchayats and urban local bodies. Most of the members of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are elected from the SHGs. Almost all the members participate in election and political process. (Annual Report 2007-2008. Programmes for Women)

## 6.5 National Plan of Action for Implementing the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women

The government adopted the national policy for the empowerment of women on 20<sup>th</sup> march, 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of public life and activities.

### 6.6 Women's Protection under Laws

Law is an important force of social change and 'social engineering' in its wider framework. Various laws give protection to women as under:

### 6.7 Protection of Women under Various Provisions of the Constitution

The preamble of the Indian constitution succinctly crystallizes and solemnly declares among other things; "justice, social, economic and political" and "equality of status and of opportunity" which by implication sought to equalize women.

In order to ensure that legal safeguards actually reach women, national commission for women was setup in 1992 with the responsibility of overseeing the working of constitutional safeguards for women, reviewing laws and regulations in selected individual cases of violation of women's rights and equality for issuing appropriate directives to the concerned authorities.

### 6.8 Women's Protection under Personal Laws

- The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955
- Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956
- Hindu Succession Act of 1956

### 6.9 Protection under Social Laws

- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- Protection from Domestic Violence Bill 2001(doubt in year2001 or 2005)

### 6.10 Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment

The protection against sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill, 2005

Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983, known as Anti-Rape Law Amendment provides for Protection under Labor Laws

## 7. Laws a Social Change

### 7.1 Legalization of Abortions

- 1) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- 2) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986:- 1)

- 3) Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques [Regulation and Prevention of Misuse] Act, 1994

## 7.2 National Commission for Women

The national commission for women a statutory body, was set up under the national commission for women act, 1990. The main task of the commission is to study and monitor all a matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women and to review the existing legislations and suggest amendments, wherever necessary.

## 7.3 Women's Positive and Negative Response creates Two Images of Indian Women

**Images of Indian Women:** Basically there have always been two broad images of Indian women. One is that of 'Typical Indian Woman' and another is of 'Modified Global- Indian Woman'.

## 8. Typical Indian Woman

Typical Indian woman rarely moves out of her home, and when she does, she covers her face with a veil walking respectfully a few paces behind the man. She can neither read nor write. She owns no land or assets, but labors on land and business owned by her husband, gamily, without her efforts ever being recognized. She receives lower wages than men do for her toils when she work outside, and despite having an income having no control over the way she like to spend.

Apart from working for wages, she is responsible for the care of her husband and children, in which the man takes no part, but feels it his privilege to beat her in case the quality of work done is unsatisfactory. In poor households her domestic tasks are almost always labor intensive requiring tremendous effort, several trips to the far away community tap to fetch water, carrying heads loads of kerosene rations from the far-away ration shop, cooking over coal wood stoves, scouring the utensils managing her brood of 4-5 children, etc. children she bears while still relatively young, being married in most instances during her early teens, with no control over her own fertility and the number of children she must produce. Birth take place largely within the unhygienic precincts of her small home, assisted by a local but often untrained Dai. Odds are fifty-fifty that she will be sent to school. Most certainly, she shall not study to the level of her brothers, shall attend school at irregular intervals, staying back as a dutiful daughter to help her mother whenever required to do so care for her younger brother-sister. She builds skills that can help her to confined to her role of procreating and child rearing, she eats last and left over food after the husband, children and other family eat. Her health will be the last to receive attention. Her mind is not to corrupt by exposure to modern technologies and development. She fares much worse than man on practically all indicators of human development do. Now she wants to be well educated, self-reliant, confident and economically independent.

## 9. Modified Global-Indian Women

Modified Global-Indian Woman is displaying the 'shift' in the stereotyping of the image of the Indian woman. The 'shift' in the image of the Indian woman is a result of the socio- economic transition- a period of liberalization of the economy and apparent encouragement of private investment in industry and infrastructure, inducing sustained high growth in the service sector. Thus, there was growing the emergence of a 'new' middle class, which was essentially urban, with unlimited consumerist aspirations, desires and dreams- a class, which was soon to culminate in the present-day 'dot.com generation' belonging to a global community. Thus, over the last thirty years or so, some percentages of women have asserted their development.

According to the estimate of employment in organized public and private sectors', published by the national human development report 2001, (planning commission, government of India), the number of women employed in the public sector in 1990 was 22.50 lakhs in 1990 to 1999.

Due to equity and equality enshrined in the constitution, women have found place in the opportunities given citizens in educational and economic fields. With more and more women going in for 'paidwork' outside of the 'private space' of the family, a new image of the middle-class woman started dominating the cultural milieu of emerging consumer capitalism. This image is that of an independent citizen of India-intelligent, decisive and an active agent in the micro narrative of the consumer capitalist economy that is in constant transition under the project of globalization. Therefore, the represented image of the Indian woman no longer remains that of an overtly traditional Hindu (Hindi) housewife relegated to the private spheres of the feudal family, and existing as the living embodiment of codes and notions of 'prakriti', 'pativarta' and 'sati'.

But the gender politics behind these advertisements demands that the woman of the household be kept in good health so that she might smoothly perform her duties and ensure that there is no disorder in the comfortable lifestyle of the other members of the family who are 'destined' to enjoy the fruits of her labor. This is notoriously encapsulated in the micro narrative of the advertisement for 'Moov' pain relief ointment-with the copy line 'kamar fit to parivar fit' (riddance of backache for the housewife makes a happy family). At last there is recognition to her gender role. However, globalization and modernization reconstructs the image of the woman exactly to that extent of which she is required certain socio-economic roles necessary for their structuring of the national economy, without any violation to the existing gender ideology.

## 10. Conclusion

The underlying message is that several things may change with time, but the beautiful longhaired look of the 'true' Indian woman remains un-changed (like the hair oil that is essential for the maintenance of such an identity). In the

case of Shalimar Coconut Oil, too, we have the daughter-in-law to the vegetable market on a two-wheeler.

Yet, all these factors do not enable the 'Modified Global-Indian Woman' to question the system of values that still designates gender-specific qualities, although these have been redefined and regenerated, with the good old hierarchical implications embedded in them. This is due to the changing structure of society, with the increasing number of women earning members in the family, with the enhancement of the purchasing power of women. Modified image of the homebound wife, mother has undergone some very important changes- a process that had already begun, although at an incipient stage in the 1970s.

To sum up, Development is a process that all members of a society to the same extent, according to their individual needs. Since women are generally excluded disadvantaged in relation to social and economic resources and decision-making. The nations and states therefore try to achieve this through constitutional, legal, political and development frameworks. These policies are designed in such a way that they help to channelize the resources to ensure development of both women and men. In spite of these policies women are not able to respond to the development process due to their disadvantaged position that is evident from the statistical data of the country.

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## Author Profile



**Seema** has completed her B.A (Hons) in Geography from Bhim Rao Ambedkar College, Delhi. She has done her M.A in Geography from Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi in 2012. Presently she is pursuing her M.Phil programme from Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. Women Issue, Conflict, Crime, Corruption, Politics and Development Issues are areas of her Interest.