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Women Empowerment

Editor
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337

41.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND227	55.	F
	EDUCATION IN RURAL AREA		C
	Dr. SUDAM LAXMAN KUMAR	56.	C
42.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND236		I
	ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN INDIA	57.	F
	Dr. Ashok P. Tiparse		/
43.	Empowerment of Women and240	58.	S
	Empowerment of Nation		/
	Dr. Ramakant V. Ghadge,	59.	'
44.	ROLE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT245		I
	IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT		I
	Dr. B.G.Sonwane	60.	'
45.	A Brief Discussion Women Empowerment in India251		I
	Dr. Dakore B. V. Joshi T.M.	61.	'
46.	Women Empowerment: Ways and Importance256		I
	Mamadge P. D., Kokane J. P.	62.	'
47.	Women Empowerment for Healthy261		I
	Development of Nation		I
	Prof S.V. Mane	63.	'
48.	Impact of Globalization on Women's Empowerment265		I
	Dr. A.P.Barve		I
49.	Economic Empowerment of Women Through271	64.	'
	Self Help Groups		I
	Dr. S.S. Devnalkar		I
50.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE277	65.	'
	COMMUNITY		I
	Prof. More Dattatraya Mukundrao		I
51.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH281	66.	'
	AGROBASED INDUSTRIES		I
	Anantwar Pradip shivaji	67.	'
52.	Women Empowerment in India and Dairy Business288		I
	Prof. Vilas Lute, Prof. Biradar, Dr. V. V. Niras		I
53.	Women Participation in MGNREGA as293	68.	'
	a tool for women empowerment: An Overview		I
	Manpreet Kaur,	69.	'
54.	Women as an Economic Power298		I
	Manwinder Singh,		I

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42.
REASERCH PAPER
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION :-

The Multiple forms of violence experienced in the household, at the community level, and in some instances by the state threaten women's security in Indian. In many parts of North India son preference is a widely practiced phenomenon. Son preference has direct linkages to sex-selective abortion (illegal across India; however enforcement by both police and some doctors is still lacking), and discrimination of girl children in access to health, nutrition, and education. Research conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) found that, although not universal, particularly in households where there is more than one daughter there are significant differences in nutrition and health levels between male and female children.

Additionally, at the household level, incest, rape and domestic violence continue to hinder women's development across India. Forty percent of all sexual abuse cases in India re incest, and 94% of the incest cases had a known member of the household as the perpetrator.

India is one of the world's fastest growing economies, with women mainly from the middle class increasingly entering the workforce. Urban centres like Delhi and Bangalore have seen an influx of young women from semi-urban and rural parts of the country, living alone and redefining themselves. However, the story of economic empowerment

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for women is not a singular narrative; rather it is located in a complex set of caste, class, religious and ethnic identities.

The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic forum in 2009 ranked India 114th out of 134 countries for inequality between men and women in the economy, politics, health, and education. On equal economic opportunities and women's participation in the labour force, India ranked 127th and 122nd respectively. The Number of women in the workforce varies greatly from state to state: 21% in Delhi; 23% in Punjab; 65% in Manipur; 71% Chhattisgarh; 76% in Arunachal Pradesh.

²⁸ The diversity of women's economic opportunities between states is due to the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity of each state. Northern states like Delhi and Punjab lag far behind on gender equality measures, including the alarming sex ratio between men and women (due to son preference and sex-selective abortion), low female literacy levels, and high rates of gender-based violence.

In rural India, women's economic opportunities remain restricted by social, cultural, and religious barriers. Most notably inheritance laws embedded in Hindu and Shariat civil codes continue to marginalize women in the household and the larger community. Rural women, particularly of lower caste and class, have the lowest literacy rates, and therefore do not have the capacity to negotiate pay or contracts and most often engage in the unorganized sector, self-employment, or in small scale industry. Self-help groups (SHGs) are a widely practiced model for social and economic mobility by NGOs and the government. (SHGs) provide women with the opportunity to manage loans and savings that can be used by members for varying needs. SHGs also are used to promote social change among the members and the community at large. Members of SHGs have used their experience as leverage to enter other local institutions such as the Panchayat Khap.

Rural, low caste, and tribal women also make up 70% of domestic workers in India, a sector which is largely unregulated and unorganized. India's growing economy has allowed for many upper and middle-class women to enter the workforce, and while poor rural women have little access to education and training, there is a high demand for domestic workers in urban hubs.

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Domestic workers are mostly illiterate, with little or no negotiating power for wage equity, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation and sexual and physical abuse.

There is a movement at the policy level to organize domestic workers and to create laws to regulate minimum wage, working hours, and other measures such as life and health insurance. Currently a national-level Taskforce on Domestic Workers has been formed that will present recommended domestic workers in India.

Women are also very visible in the construction sector in India, and like domestic workers are largely unorganized and rely on daily wagers. Women construction workers are mostly poor and illiterate and have little negotiating power. This sector is also unregulated and highly vulnerable to exploitation. Women workers also earn significantly less than men, although women are the ones who do most of the backbreaking work like carrying bricks and other heavy materials on site.

On the other end of the spectrum, while India has one of the highest percentages of professional women in the world, those who occupy managerial positions are under 3%. Most women work in low administrative positions, and many of the young women migrating to urban centres mostly work in service and retail industries, although more and more women are entering the IT and other technical sectors. **Women's Economic, Social, and Cultural Right**

The movement to assure women's economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) as basic human rights is just emerging in India. The movement aims to locate women's rights within the larger human rights framework, and by doing so moves away from looking at women's issues only within the framework of violence against women and reproductive rights. ESCR attempts to look at the broader issues facing women, namely poverty, housing, unemployment, education, water, food security, trade, etc,

While the human rights movement on ESCR is largely contained at the international policy level, there are emerging social movements around the world. In the India context, projects like the Programme on Women's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), for

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example, is creating, linkages between the international human rights movement and the local articulation of women's rights. PWESCR aims to build a women's rights movement in India that creates equality in all spheres of women's lives. By empowering women economically and socially, ESCR provides for a broader discourse on rights that moves women's lives. By empowering women economically and socially, ESCR Provides for a broader discourse on rights that moves women's rights form a victim-centered approach to one that cuts across other fundamental human rights issues.

Women's economic opportunity in India is a rapidly changing landscape. Women are increasingly entering the workforce-particularly women professionals-and are crating change, but there remains a large number of invisible women workers in unorganized and volatile sectors. However, organizing at the local level, albeit small, is widespread. Implementation of national and state level policies lags behind in ensuring that women workers have equal pay and are free from exploitation.

Poverty is Considered the greatest threat to peace in the world. Eradication of poverty should be a national goal. Due to poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives are usurped by the man of the house.

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342