



Changing status of Women in India

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Abstract:

The journey of socio-economic upliftment of women in Indian society can be traced back to the Pre-Mughal period. The society has witnessed a number of ups and downs as far as status of women in the society is concerned. While the condition of women in the society was far better in the pre-mughal period, it continued to decline during the mughal period and the British period. Some improvement was observed in the post Independence period. The labour Force Participation Rate of women was low and continues to remain so. The government has introduced a number of schemes for the socio-economic upliftment of the women. Despite a number of employment generation programmes for women, their participation in the total labour force continues to be low. The entire society is still being dominated by the males

Keywords: *Employment, Government sponsored schemes, Socio-economic status*

1. Introduction

There has been a growing consensus that gender equality is “Smart Economics”. Recent studies have found that by reducing gender discrimination and promoting women’s participation in large numbers, there is likely to be a positive effect on economic growth of a nation. In addition to boosting economic growth, increased women’s participation in economic development and reduced gender gaps have positive spillover effects in terms of improved child health and education, accelerating poverty reduction and spurring productivity. Furthermore, women’s participation in employment can help reduce gender equality by empowering women and contributing to their capacity to exert choice and decision making power and agency in key domains of their lives. However, as Boserup’s (1970). pioneering work concluded, in spite of the contribution of women to key economic sectors, development policies and processes remain biased.

Even after over half a century since the ILO Conference was held in 1958 regarding promoting non-discrimination, the gender gap in the society continues to exist. Women disproportionately confront challenges in access to employment, working conditions, job security, wage parity and balancing work and family responsibilities (ILO & ADB 2011)..

However, over the past one and a half decades, the Indian society has witnessed a remarkable transformation and the status of women in the society has improved significantly. This is attributable to both economic and non-economic factors, such as structural changes, urbanization, increased education attainment, lower fertility rates, changing societal norms and available employment opportunities. But it is often the case in developing countries that it results from declining household income during economic crisis. Moreover, many women are home based and contribute to non-market activities, such as caregiving, which despite having economic benefits for households remain largely unseen and unaccounted for.

This paper deals with a plethora of issues which have dragged this section of population away from the mainstream of economic development in the past and how the gradual societal changes have given this

section an opportunity to enlighten and develop themselves so that they can walk hand in hand with their male counterparts.

2. Status of women-Past and Present compared

The status of women in ancient India was quite high esteemed however it got deteriorated with the passage of time and mentality of people towards women. Earlier in the Vedic times, women were given lots of respect and honor in the Indian society. They were equally given opportunities like men to develop socially, intellectually and morally. They were completely free to choose their own path in the life and select life partner. They got complete education before marriage as well as military training for their own safety.

However, status of women in the Indian society got deteriorated in the middle ages because of various bad practices against women.^[2] the society talked volumes about the high status of women in the society but in reality, it was not to be. Women were prohibited to take part in many domestic, social as well as external affairs. They were forced to live under the influence of parents before marriage and under the influence of husbands after marriage. Their social status further deteriorated during the Mughal period. Women were forced to follow the rules of sati pratha, parda pratha, etc.

Even during the British period, the social status of women did not change much. It was only after several years of freedom struggle when Mahatma Gandhi gave a call for women to come forward and take part in the independence movement that a change in terms of socio-economic upliftment of women was observed. Freedom fighters like Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, etc helped in changing the status of women in India by organizing and motivating them.

There has been a lot of improvement in the status of women in India after the independence. Gradually women started enjoying at par status with men in the society. Today, Women enjoy all the rights and privileges in almost every area as their male counterparts and it is equally supported by the constitutional provisions. It is but obvious that India cannot take forward strides on the path of economic development by neglecting women who constitute nearly 50% of the total population. The female population of the country, both living in rural and urban areas, are fully aware about their economic, social and political rights.

They are actively participating in the democratic process through elections. Today, women voters outnumber men voters on polling day. Some of the great Indian women leaders, social reformers, social workers, administrators, and literary personalities who have changed the women status a lot are Indira Gandhi, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Annie Besant, Mahadevi Verma, Sucheta Kripalani, P.T. Usha, Amrita Pritam, Kalpana Chawla, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Mother Teresa, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, etc. to name a few. However, despite the tall claims of the society regarding socio-economic upliftment and their empowerment, the rising cases of rape and sex discrimination in the society is alarming.

For ensuring women safety and reduce crime against women, government of India has passed another Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children). Bill, 2015 replacing the earlier Indian juvenile delinquency law of 2000. This act is passed especially after the Nirbhaya case when a accused juvenile was released. According to this act, the juvenile age has been reduced to 16 years from 18 years in cases of heinous offenses.

4. Participation and role of women in different areas

Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.^[3]

4.1 Education

Though it is gradually increasing, the female literacy rate in India is less than the male literacy rate.^[4] Far fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school, and the dropout level of girls is high. In urban India, girls are

nearly at par with boys in terms of education. However, in rural India, girls continue to be less educated than boys. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy. According to scholars, the major factor behind improvements in the social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy.^[5] Under the Non-Formal Education programme (NFE), about 40% of the NFE centres in states and 10% of the centres in UTs are exclusively reserved for females. As of 2000, about 300,000 NFE centres were catering to about 7.42 million children. About 120,000 NFE centres were exclusively for girls.^[6] The literacy rate is lower for women compared to men: the literacy rate is 60.6% for females, while for males it is 81.3%. The 2011 census, however, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. (population aged 15 or older, data from 2015).^[7]

4.2 Politics

India has one of the highest number of female politicians in the world. Women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition.^[8] The Indian states Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura have implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs.^[9] ^[10] Majority of candidates in these Panchayats are women. Currently 100% of elected members in Kodassery Panchayat in Kerala are Women.^[11] There are currently 5 female chief ministers in India.

5. Women's Labour force Participation in India

Contrary to common perception, a large percentage of women in India work.^[12] National data collection agencies accept that statistics seriously understate women's contribution as workers.^[5] However, there are far fewer women than men in the paid workforce. According to National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO).survey on Employment and Unemployment Situation in India conducted in 2009-10, the labour force participation rate for women aged 15 years and above fell by 10.1 percentage points as compared with the previous survey round, corresponding to 22.6 million fewer women in the labourforce in 2010 than in 2005 (including both the usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS)). This decline was registered in both urban and rural areas, which dropped by 11.5 and 5.0 percentage points respectively. In comparison, male participation in India declined by only 3.4 percentage points over the same period. Based on the most recent Survey (NSSO 2014), female participation declined further in rural areas- a drop of two percentage points since 2010, while in urban areas, the rate increased by 1.1 percentage points. The overall female participation rate declined by 1.3 percentage points while the male participation rate dropped by 0.8 percentage points. Interestingly, such decline in participation occurred at a time when the growth rate in India is around 8% of GDP (World Bank 2012).. This growth rate, if sustained over a long period of time, would generate adequate employment opportunities to reduce incidence of poverty. Further, the fertility rate has declined from 3.9 in 1990 to 2.6 in 2011, which tends to increase female participation in labour market.

The overall female participation rate in India had been low as compared to other countries of the World. In 1994, it ranked 68th out of 83 countries whose data in terms of female participation rate was available. In 2012, it ranked 84th out of 87 countries.

In urban India, women participate in the workforce in impressive numbers. For example, in the software industry 30% of the workforce is female.^[13]

In rural India in the agriculture and allied industrial sectors, females account for as much as 89.5% of the labour force. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour. According to a 1991 World Bank report, women accounted for 94% of total employment in dairy production in India. Women constitute 51% of the total employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises.^[14] A little under four-fifths (about 79 per cent). of the rural women workers are employed in the agriculture sector, a sector that is marked by shortage of paid jobs, decelerating and differential wages

on basis of gender and degradation of resources. It is estimated that about 60% of all agricultural operations are handled exclusively by women. Female hourly wage rates in agriculture vary from 50 to 75% of male rates, and are too low to overcome absolute poverty.

Distribution (per 1000) of usually employed women (principal status). by broad industry division

Sr.	Year	Agriculture		Manufacturing		Construction		Others	
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1.	2004-05	814	147	87	254	17	45	30	147
2.	2007-08	816	129	76	252	23	48	28	150
3.	2009-10	789	118	76	258	42	51	34	139

Source: * 61st, **64th and 66th rounds of NSSO Surveys ^[15]

5.1 Land and property rights

In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names, and do not get a share of parental property.^[5] Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property.^[16] In India, women's property rights vary depending on religion, and tribe, and are subject to a complex mix of law and custom,^[17] but in principle the move has been towards granting women equal legal rights, especially since the passing of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.^[18]

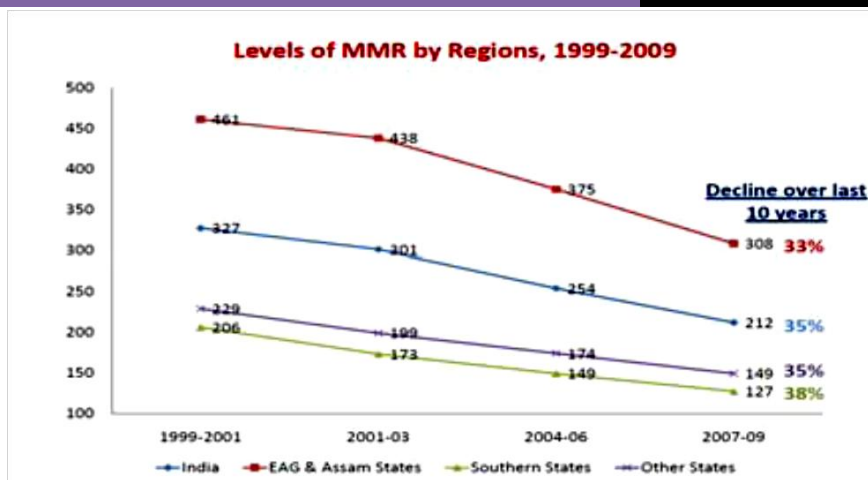
The Hindu personal laws of 1956 (applying to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains). gave women rights to inheritances. However, sons had an independent share in the ancestral property, while the daughters' shares were based on the share received by their father. Hence, a father could effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but a son would continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, had no residential rights in the ancestral home. Thanks to amendment of the Hindu laws in 2005, women now have the same status as men.^[19] In 1986, the Supreme Court of India ruled that Shah Bano, an elderly divorced Muslim woman, was eligible for maintenance money. However, the decision was opposed by fundamentalist Muslim leaders, who alleged that the court was interfering in their personal law. The Union Government subsequently passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce). Act.^[20]

Similarly, Christian women have struggled over years for equal rights in divorce and succession. In 1994, all churches, jointly with women's organizations, drew up a draft law called the Christian Marriage and Matrimonial Causes Bill. However, the government has still not amended the relevant laws. In 2014, the Law Commission of India has asked the government to modify the law to give Christian women equal property rights.^[21]

5.2 Health

The average female life expectancy today in India is low compared to many countries, but it has shown gradual improvement over the years. In many families, especially rural ones, girls and women face nutritional discrimination within the family, and are anaemic and malnourished.^[5] Almost half of adolescent girls are chronically malnourished. In addition, poor nutrition during pregnancy often leads to birth complications. The maternal mortality in India is the 56th highest in the world. 42% of births in the country are supervised in Medical Institution. In rural areas, most of women deliver with the help of women in the family, contradictory to the fact that the unprofessional or unskilled deliverer lacks the knowledge about pregnancy.

On the health front implementation of the National Rural Health Mission has resulted in an improvement in many development indicators related to women. Fertility Rates have come down and have reached replacement levels in a number of states, Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR). is improving, from 301 per 100,000 live births in 2003 it has come down to 212 in 2009; Infant Mortality Rate, though still high, has reduced to 50 per 1000 in 2009. Further, institutional deliveries have risen from 39 percent in 2006 to 78 percent in 2009, and availability of HIV/AIDS treatment has been enhanced.



Source: SRS, 2011

Fig. 1: Trend in Maternal Mortality Ratio

Another challenge in spite of the successes of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). is that only 1/3rd of Muslim and Scheduled Caste women have been able to access institutional deliveries, it is even fewer for women of Scheduled Tribes. Furthermore, the third common review of NRHM shows that after delivery mothers remain in institutions for less than half a day and therefore do not avail of critical health care services needed at that time. In 2005-06, while more than 70 % women had at least 1 ante-natal care (ANC).. Visit, the proportion of pregnant women who have 3 or more ante natal visits was much lower. This reflects insufficient care provided to pregnant women. Women in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland and Uttar Pradesh had the least access to ante-natal care (ANC).. Not even 50 % Muslim and ST and SC women. Further, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh are recording higher life expectancies for men than women. According to the India Human Development Report 2011, one of the reasons for this is the discrimination against the girl child in terms of nutrition and health care right from infancy. Efforts towards attitudinal changes that reduce son preference need to be accelerated.^[22]

5.3 Crimes against women

Police records in India show a high incidence of crimes against women. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that by 2010 growth in the rate of crimes against women would exceed the population growth rate.^[5] Earlier, many crimes against women were not reported to police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation. Official statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women.^[5]

5.4 Acid throwing

A Thomas Reuters Foundation survey^[23] says that India is the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women to live in.^[24] Women belonging to any class, caste, creed or religion can be victims of this cruel form of violence and disfigurement, a premeditated crime intended to kill or maim permanently and act as a lesson to put a woman in her place. In India, acid attacks on women^[25] who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for a divorce^[26] are a form of revenge. Acid is cheap, easily available, and the quickest way to destroy a woman's life. The numbers of acid attacks have been rising.^[27]

5.5 Child marriage

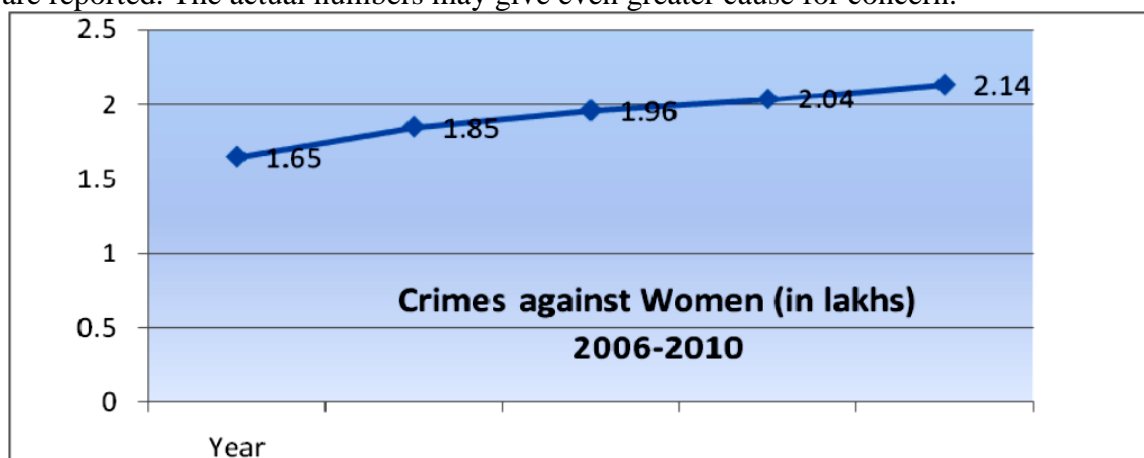
Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this day. Historically, child brides would live with their parents until they reached puberty. In the past, child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaved heads, living in isolation, and being shunned by society.^[28] Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice.^[29] The Child Marriage Restraint Act,

1929 is the relevant legislation in the country. According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas.^[30]

5.6 Domestic violence

Violence against a woman affects her sense of self esteem, demolishes her self confidence and is often used as a potent tool of subjugation and disempowerment. The 2005-06 National Family Health Survey (NFHS- III). reported that one-third of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence, and approximately one in 10 had been a victim of sexual violence.

A study of the data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). shows the increasing incidence of crimes against women. The total number of crimes against women increased by 29.6 per cent between 2006 and 2010. Further, these numbers have to be viewed keeping in mind that not all crimes against women are reported. The actual numbers may give even greater cause for concern.^[31]



The National Crime Records Bureau reveal that a crime against a woman is committed every three minutes, a woman is raped every 29 minutes, a dowry death occurs every 77 minutes, and one case of cruelty committed by either the husband or relative of the husband occurs every nine minute. This occurs despite the fact that women in India are legally protected from domestic abuse under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.^[32]

In India, domestic violence toward women is considered as any type of abuse that can be considered a threat; it can also be physical, psychological, or sexual abuse to any current or former partner. Domestic violence is not handled as a crime or complaint; it is seen more as a private or family matter. In determining the category of a complaint, it is based on caste, class, religious bias and race which also determine whether action is to be taken or not. Many studies have reported about the prevalence of the violence and have taken a criminal-justice approach, but most women refuse to report it. These women are guaranteed constitutional justice, dignity and equality but continue to refuse based on their socio-cultural contexts. As the women refuse to speak of the violence and find help, they are also not receiving the proper treatment.^[33]

5.7 Dowry

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act,^[34] making dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. In the 1980s, numerous such cases were reported.^[35]

In 1985, the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom). Rules were framed.^[36] According to these rules, a signed list should be maintained of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of who has given the present, and relationship to the recipient. However, such rules are rarely enforced.

A 1997 report claimed that each year at least 5,000 women in India die dowry-related deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional.^[37] The term for this is "bride burning" and is criticised within India itself. In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths. Unofficial estimates claim the figures are at least three times as high.^[38]

6. Female infanticide and sex-selective abortion

The sex ratio in India according to 2011 census is 940/1000. In India, the male-female sex ratio is skewed dramatically in favour of males, the chief reason being the high number of females who die before reaching adulthood. Tribal societies in India have a less skewed sex ratio than other caste groups. This is in spite of the fact that tribal communities have far lower income levels, lower literacy rates, and less adequate health facilities.^[5] Many experts suggest the higher number of males in India can be attributed to female infanticides and sex-selective abortions. The sex ratio is particularly bad in the north-western area of the country, particularly in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.^[39]

Ultrasound scanning constitutes a major leap forward in providing for the care of mother and baby, and with scanners becoming portable, these advantages have spread to rural populations. However, ultrasound scans often reveal the sex of the baby, allowing pregnant women to decide to abort female fetuses and try again later for a male child. This practice is usually considered the main reason for the change in the ratio of male to female children being born.

In 1994 the Indian government passed a law forbidding women or their families from asking about the sex of the baby after an ultrasound scan (or any other test which would yield that information). and also expressly forbade doctors or any other persons from providing that information. In practice this law (like the law forbidding dowries). is widely ignored, and levels of abortion on female fetuses remain high and the sex ratio at birth keeps getting more skewed.^[40]

7. Schemes and Programmes for Empowerment of Women

Swawlamban Programme-Swawlamban Programme, previously known as NORAD/Women's Economic Programme, was launched in 1982-83 with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD).. NORAD assistance was availed till 1996 – 97 after which the programme is being run with Government of India funds. The objective of the programme is to provide training and skills to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self employment on sustained basis. The target groups under the scheme are the poor and needy women, women from weaker sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes etc. In order to ensure more effective implementation and for better monitoring/evaluation of the scheme, it has been transferred to the State governments from 1st April 2006 with the approval of Planning Commission.

Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP). –This programme seeks to provide skills and new knowledge to poor and asset less women in the traditional sectors. Under this project, women beneficiaries are organized into viable and cohesive groups or cooperatives. A comprehensive package of services such as health care, elementary education, crèche facility, market linkages, etc. are provided besides access to credit. Skill development is provided in ten traditional skills amongst women. This is a Central Scheme launched in 1987. The Ministry is at present getting the programme evaluated. Based on the results of the evaluation, the scheme is proposed to be revamped. Further, the possibilities of providing training and skills to women both in traditional and non-traditional sectors and integrating with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh for credit linkages are being considered. A sum of Rs. 240 crore is proposed for the scheme in the XI Plan.^[41]

Ujjawala-A comprehensive scheme to combat trafficking was launched in December 2007 and is being implemented mainly through NGOs. The scheme has five components- Prevention, Rescue, Rehabilitation, reintegration and Repatriation of trafficked victim for commercial sexual exploitation.

Swadhaar-Swadhaar Scheme was launched in the year 2001-02 for the benefit of women in difficult circumstances with the objectives to provide primary needs of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls living in difficult circumstances who are without any social and economic support.

Mother and Child tracking System-The Mother and Child Tracking System, launched in 2009, helps monitor the health care system to ensure that all mothers and their children have access to a range of services, including pregnancy care, medical care during delivery, and immunizations. The system consists of a database of all pregnancies registered at health care facilities since 1 December 2009, and all births since 1 December 2009.

The Indira Gandhi Matratva Sahyog Yojna Conditional Maternity Benefit Plan(CMB).- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)., Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB). is a scheme sponsored by the national government for pregnant and lactating women age 19 and over for their first two live births. The programme, which began in October 2010, provides money to help ensure the good health and nutrition of the recipients. As of March 2013 the programme is being offered in 53 districts around the country.

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescents Girls-Sabla-The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls – Sabla is an initiative launched in 2012 that targets adolescent girls. The scheme offers a package of benefits to at-risk girls between the ages of 10 and 19. It is being offered initially as a pilot programme in 200 districts. The programme offers a variety of services to help young women become self-reliant, including nutritional supplementation and education, health education and services, and life skills and vocational training.

Rastriya Mahila Kosh-Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (The National Credit Fund for Women). was created by the Government of India in 1993. Its purpose is to provide lower income women with access to loans to begin small businesses.^[42]

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS).-MNREGS heralded a new beginning in addressing the unemployment crisis. This nationwide employment programme guarantees 100 days of unskilled work for every household in the rural area in every year.

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).-The ICDS, which currently covers 8.63 crore children and pregnant and lactating women, is the world's largest programme for early childhood development and care. It is significant to note that the number of beneficiaries for supplementary nutrition has increased from 705.43 Lakhs in 2006-07 to 884.34 Lakhs in 2009-2010 (upto 31.03.2010).. Similarly, the number of children in the 3-6 year age group attending AWCs for pre-school education has increased from 300.81 lakhs in 2006-07 to 354.94 lakhs in 2009-2010 (upto 31.03.2010)..

Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC).-TSC is a comprehensive programme to ensure sanitation facilities in rural areas with the broader goal to eradicate the practice of open defecation. The key intervention areas are Individual Household Latrines (IHL)., School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE)., Community Sanitary Complex, Anganwadi toilets supported by Rural Sanitary Marts (RSMs). and Production Centers (PCs).. In the XI Plan, there was a target to construct 72.9 million individual household latrines. Out of these, only 27.9 million were constructed with an expenditure of Rs. 2791 crore by September 2009. It was also targeted that separate toilet blocks would be constructed for girls in all schools. It has been realised that infrastructure facility for toilet and water has to go hand in hand; otherwise failure is in-built in any effort with regard to sanitation. For the sanitation program to be sustainable, it must focus on needs of women.^[22]

8. Conclusion

Through this study it can be concluded that as the women have equal participation in human development. They constitute half of the total population. Women are not treated with respect as in the Indian society. Lot of crime against women is seen in modern society. Despite a number of employment generation programmes for women, their participation in the total labour force continues to be low. The entire society is still being dominated by the males.

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