

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A VITAL NEED FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Thangamani Waghmare

*Associate Professor of Economics, National Defence Academy, Pune*

### **Abstract**

*No country in the world has achieved gender equality. The four highest-ranking countries— Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden—have closed a little over 80% of their gender gaps, while the lowest ranking country— Yemen—has closed only around 46% of its gender gap. The Global Gender Gap Index was developed in 2006 partially to address the need for a consistent and comprehensive measure for gender equality that can track a country's progress over time, investment in girls' education has significant multiplier effects: it reduces high fertility rates, lowers infant and child mortality rates, lowers maternal mortality rates, increases women's labour force participation rates and earnings and fosters educational investment in children. These outcomes not only improve the quality of life, they also foster faster economic growth and development. The famous quote states that "Gender equality is not a women's issue, it is a human issue. It affects us all".*

*Therefore Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, especially the traditionally underprivileged women in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But in actual practice women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life that how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. This paper attempts to analyze the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment especially scheduled tribe women of Erode district in Tamil Nadu. The study is based on primary and secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India especially scheduled tribe women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. The study concludes that access to education, employment and change in social structure can only bring changes in women's life to attain women empowerment.*

**Key words:** *Education, Employment and change in social structure.*

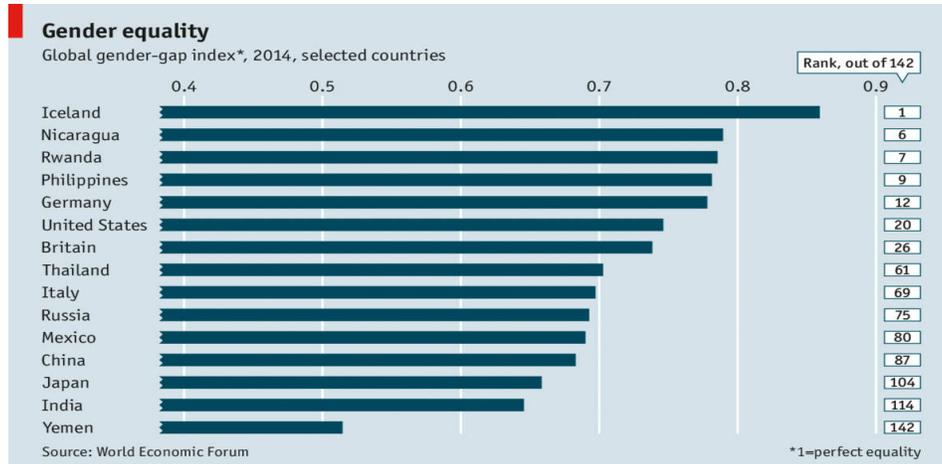
### **Introduction**

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status, social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

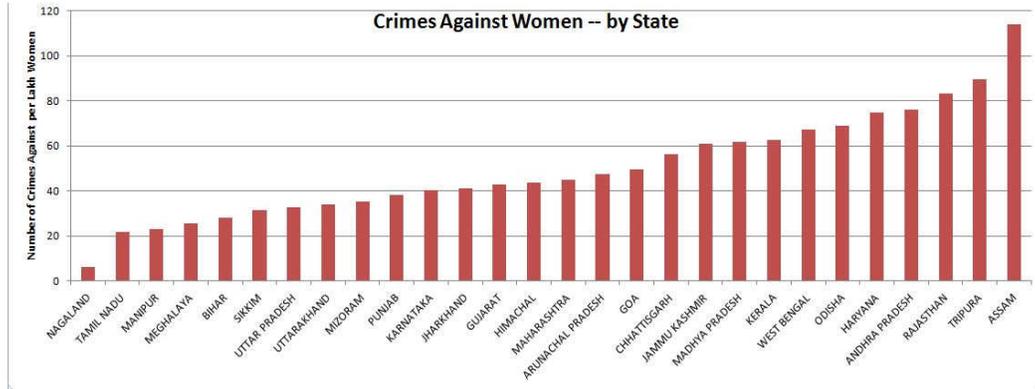
The following figure explains the Gender equality of selected countries



For the sixth consecutive year Iceland has come out best in the World Economic Forum's gender-gap index, which examines disparities between men and women in terms of political empowerment, economic opportunity, health and education. It scored 0.86 on an index in which one denotes perfect equality. The Nordic countries all did well, taking the top five positions of the 142 countries in the ranking. Some emerging economies also have high gender equality. Nicaragua ranked sixth; Rwanda, included for the first time this year, was placed seventh overall and first in Sub-Saharan Africa, thanks to a particularly small gap between men and women in the political-empowerment category. India stands 114<sup>th</sup> position among these countries. Therefore it is necessary to take adequate measures to improve the conditions of women in all walks of life.

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. It includes increasing a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to effect change. Yet gender issues are not focused on women alone, but on the relationship between men and women in society, but in actual practice women are undergoing various types of crimes in every days life the following figure explains the crime against women over a large range across the various states in India in terms of their rate of occurrence. This may have multiple reasons but it may also be complicated by the fact that poor law enforcement in poorly governed states may result in under-reporting of crime. But if we assume the NCRB data to be true, the distribution across various states of India.

Crime against women over a large range across the various states in India

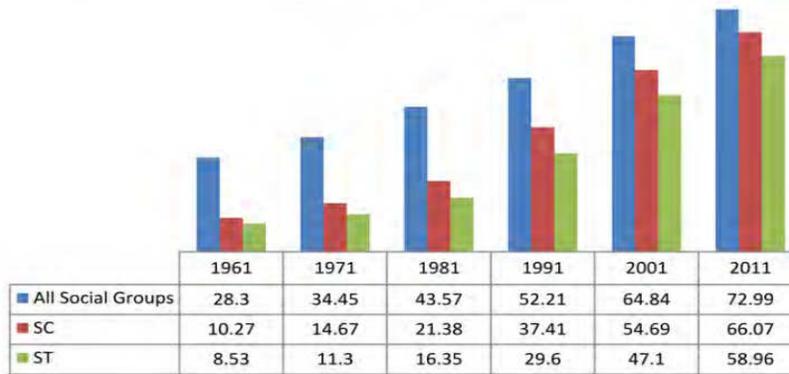


Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), New Delhi. NCRB is an attached office of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India, 2016.

The above figure reveals that crime against the women exists in almost all states but is very high in states like Assam, Tripura and Nagaland.

According to the 2011 The scheduled tribe population of India constitute 8.6% of total population of the country and majority of them reside in the rural areas (90%), who live in remote and isolated regions and engage in primitive occupations, in tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial, because they work harder and the family economy and management depends on them. and they are considered as a development factor in their family as well as society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, political, social position, good health and empowerment etc therefore government has taken various efforts to improve literacy rate of the population including the scheduled tribe population, the following figure explains that the impact of education policies on various sections of population.

G2.1: Comparative Literacy Rate of All Social Groups, SC and ST Population (1961-2011)



The above figure reveals that there is an increase in the literacy rate of all these groups over the years from 1961 to 2011. But there is a variation in raising the literacy rate of SC and ST Population. Therefore government should pay adequate attention on the tribal population. Scheduled tribe population of Tamil Nadu constitutes 1.04 percent of the total population of India. The study area covers two hamlets (Gethesal and Melamavallam) of Hasanur village of Thalavadi block in Periyar district. Geddesal is an isolated settlement situated in the interior forest between the mountains of Thimbam range; On 18 March 2013, a government order under the "The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006" has been circulated to the conservator of forests in Erode that the home to about 25 tigers and 1200 elephants has been made as a Tiger Reserve with effect from 15 March 2013. Sathyamangalam will be the fourth tiger reserve in the state the other three being Mudumalai, Kalakkad Mundanthurai and Anamalai.

There is no frequent transportation to this settlement. It is a homogenous settlement with only Sholaga tribe with a population of 370 households and, in Melamavallam hamlet there are 100 households are there .The author has selected 55 households for the present study from both these areas, and the data was collected in 2014 to analyse the status of women in the society . The role of women in tribal communities is substantial and crucial; collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as agricultural labourers, households and construction, contributing to their family income. However, tribal women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and the interference of outsiders. Undoubtedly, the programmes, oriented towards the empowerment of tribal women have not improved much in their socio-economic conditions and status. However, there are wide variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity and social life.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. Economic prosperity of the country is directly influenced by the skilled manpower (which includes both women and men).
2. To analyze the factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
3. To identify the problems of Women Empowerment and suggest remedies upon it.

#### **Research Methodology**

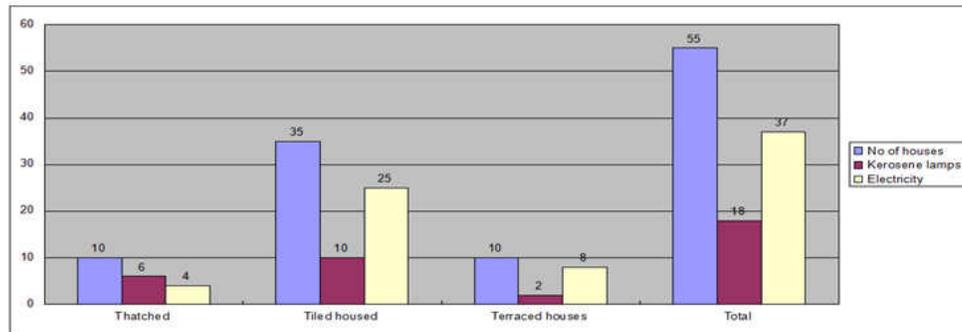
This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is from primary and secondary sources according to the need of this study.

The first objective has been proved with the help of secondary sources that unlike developed countries, women empowerment in India is extremely poor in India this due to the lack of socio economic and traditional values.

Development of the country is directly influenced by the strong human power which includes both men and women. Therefore the government should take adequate measures to improve the status of the women by giving equal opportunities in all walks of life.

The housing condition of the tribal population has been explained in the following figure.

**Figure 1: Housing Conditions of the Tribal Hamlets**



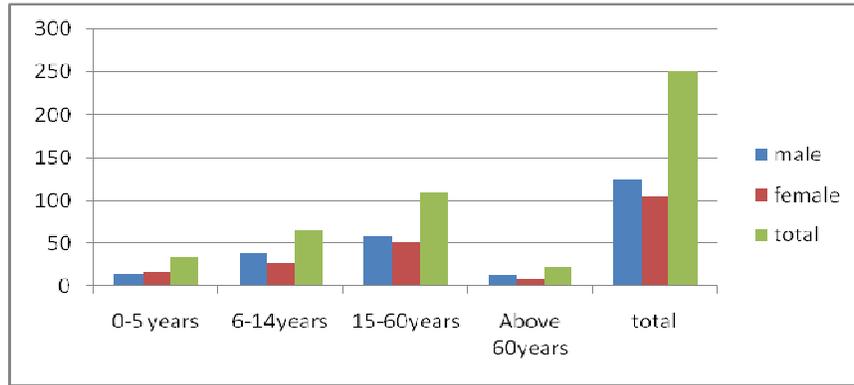
**Source:** Field survey.

The figure explains that only 37 houses are electrified and the people are still using the kerosene lamps in their houses, and also people are living in terraced houses in the reserved forest. It is important to note that the socio economic conditions of tribal population are much worse than the other sections of the plain population. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is the another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment Therefore attaining women empowerment is totally an illusion in these areas.

#### **Sex and Age Group of People**

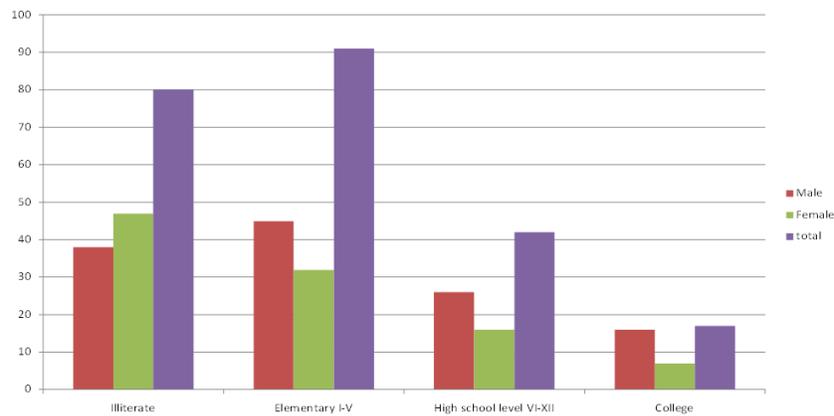
The following figure explains that the proportion of female population to male population is lesser; this is due to lack of medical and adequate infrastructural facilities. The society is more biased in favour of a male child in respect to education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India; therefore there is rise in the rate of infant and maternal mortality of women in this area.

**Figure 2: Sex and Age Group of People**



Source: Field survey.

**Figure 3: Educational Particulars**



Source: Field survey

The above figure explains the literacy rate of tribal hamlets; most Gethesal settlement has education facility up to middle school. This had created a positive impact on the increase in enrolment of tribal children in school, especially; the girls had the opportunity to access it. In the recent years enrolment rate has increased among the Sholaga children of this settlement. In case of secondary and higher secondary schooling, the children in this village have to travel 15 kilometers distance, by this number of students availing secondary school education become very minimal especially with respect to the girl children.

**Women and Employment**

Minor forest produce forms a major source of income in many tribal communities, especially those having less than five acres of land. Women and children are almost

exclusively involved in collection of minor forest produce, its storage, processing and marketing .Increased government control of forests has disturbed tribal economy adversely affecting tribal's lives, particularly that of women. Appointing of agents from outside for collecting forest produce has not only affected their livelihood, but has also made the work of women more difficult. Collection of fuel wood has become more difficult since it is less accessible and more time-consuming. The result has been less income combined with less fuel wood available for themselves and lesser nutrition. It also leaves them little time for earning wages. Government control over forests has also reduced hunting to a ritual. Besides routine household work, the tribal women work in the agricultural fields, forests for long hours. The overall output if seen in terms of number of hours of work is low.

They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.

Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent

Their schedule of long working hours continues even during pregnancy, natal and postnatal stages. They have a negative energy balance, high morbidity rate, and low child survival rate. They suffer from taboos and superstitions and remain deprived of the benefits from existing development and welfare programmes.

The second and third objectives are proved with the help of primary sources collected from the field area.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore the study concludes that there is a strong correlation between socio economic conditions and women empowerment. There are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual empowerment of tribal women. There should be a need to increase the awareness about right and duties of tribal women to get the equal status at the state and national levels, despite existing reservations for women. As a responsible citizen schedule tribe women have a duty to acquire the education to understand their rights and duties towards country.

The government should focus empowerment of scheduled tribe women based upon their traditional skills because they have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. That means tribal women contribute immensely to the tribal agriculture .Women represent half the world's population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. The greatest need of the hour is change of social attitude to women. It is true truly said that, "When women move forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of

development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society.

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