

The Status of Women in Rajasthan: A Sociological Study

Dr. Amita Chawadha

Assistant Professor ,Department of Sociology

JNVU, Jodhpur

This paper presents the precise, complete and comprehensive Sociological Study of the Status of Women in Rajasthan. The status of women has recently become worldwide significant. The United Nations recognized the importance of the role of women by declaring **1975** as the *International Women's Year* and **1975-85** as *the UN Decade for women*. Women form about half of the population of the country, but their situation has been grey.¹ Manu Bhaskar says that there is no country in the world today, where women have equal status with men in all the major areas of life like family, health, reproduction, education, work, government and cultural expression.² Any assessment of the status of women has to start from the social framework, social structures, cultural norms and value systems that influence social expectations regarding the behaviour of both men and women and determine their roles and positions in society.

Status denotes position in terms of rights and obligations in society. A general trend in the literature on the status of women has been to compare it with men. This indicates that their status can be understood only through the rights and roles of their male counterparts. Beside certain indicators and measures such as Education, Health, Political Participation, Participation in Economic Activities, Employment, Management of Domestic Affairs, Decision about Marriage etc. are also adopted to assess the status of women.

At the core of the Sociological analysis of gender there is the distinction between biological sex and gender. Sex is the natural biological differences between females and males; this is gender which creates discrimination between two sexes. Gender is a social construction similar to race and ethnicity. Although difference between two sexes is natural but it is a hierarchy which is socially constructed and socially created that impose the superiority of men upon women. Gender is defined as the social meaning given to biological sex differences. It affects the distribution of health services, resources, wealth, work, decision making, political power, rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life.³

¹Manerkar, Gouri K. (2016), "Self Help Groups-Bank Linkage Programmes - An Instrument of Economic Upliftment of Poor Women-Case Study Shgs in Vasco Town" *Social Sciences International Research Journal*, Vol. 2: 1, p.1.

²Bhaskar, Manu (2000), "Women and Grassroot Politics: Theoretical Issues and Social Concerns of Kerala Women", *South Asian Journal of Socio Political Studies*, Vol.1, January-June, 2000, p.95.

³ United Nations (2004), *Report on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women*, New York, p. 85.

The gender issues are also not exception in Rajasthan due to its traditional social and feudalistic practices such as female infanticides, child marriage, veil (purdah), etc. Development indicators like literacy, employment, sex ratio, fertility rates, age at marriage, health and nutrition point to the very low status of women in Rajasthan. The most alarming factor regarding women is that overt and covert violence and harassment against them are increasing. The basic form of violence is killing a girl child before she is born, exists in many parts of the state.

Women have been always treated unequal in every society and Rajasthan is not an exception thus status of women in this region is also unequal to men. Mainly it is determined by the traditions in every field. Traditionally, home is the work place of women; they are expected to be bothered family members from childhood to old age. Women are also not enjoying the independency and self-dependency due to their dependency on male. Before marriage a girl has to live under her parents and/or brother, after marriage her dependency moves to her husband and later on it goes to her son. It means in the entire journey of life, women never ever feel freedom or independent.

The Status of women

The first World Conference on the status of women, was convened at Mexico city in 1975, which was also declared as International Women's Year, observed to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a firm problem in much of the world. The second World Conference was held in Copenhagen in 1980 and the third was organized at Nairobi in 1985, which is also known as the "Birth of Global Feminism".⁴ The fourth was in 1995 for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) was adopted by the governments in it.

The Beijing Platform for Action categorizes violence against women as an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace and calls on all governments to place priority on initiatives to eliminate all forms of violence against women.⁵ The mission statement of the BPA says that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights, a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on gender equality is a

⁴ United Nations Public Information (2000), "Women 2000", *Encounter*, Vol. 3:5, New Delhi, p.90.

⁵ UNESCAP (2003), *Involving Men in Eliminating Violence against Women: Examples of Good Practices*, as a background document for UNESCAP's sub regional training workshop on Elimination of Violence against Women in Partnership with Men, 2-5 December, 2003, New Delhi, India.

condition for people entered sustainable development.⁶ The BPA identified the following twelve critical areas of priority which are-

S.no.	Areas of priority
1	Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
2	Gender inequality in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels
3	Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
4	Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
5	Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
6	Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
7	Lack of respect for women & inadequate promotion & protection of their humanrights
8	Persistent discriminations against and violation of the rights of the girl child
9	Stereotyping of women and inequality in their access and participation in all communication systems, mainly in the media
10	The continual and increasing burden of poverty on women
11	The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women
12	Violence against women

The United Nations has been at the forefront of protecting women’s rights and efforts for women empowerment. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) covers a vast range of women’s social, cultural, economic, political and civil rights which usually mentioned as the “International Bill of Rights of women”. It has been ratified by 174 member countries but unfortunately,

⁶ Report on the Fourth World Conference on women, UN (A/Conference.177/20), [Online: Web] Accessed 26 March 2012, URL: <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/offla--20.en>.

only 56 Countries have ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention, which include inquiry, communication and investigation procedures.

The CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly to attain the goal of equal rights for women. It defines what constitutes discriminations against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end this kind of discrimination. It consist a preamble and 30 articles. It ensures women education and employment as well as women's equal opportunities in political and public life including right to vote and stand for election. It is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women. It entered into force on 3 September 1981, had till 31 May 1996, been ratified by 152 UN member states.

The CEDAW calls for government to remove all discriminatory barriers against women in all fields particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields. The Millennium Declaration, as a statement of values, principles and objectives for the international agenda of the 21st Century, set time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating discrimination against women. The Road Map for implementing the Declaration has been issued by the UN Secretariat, focusing on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are shaping the agenda for global and national policy development.⁷

India ratified the Convention on 25 June 1993 with “Declaratory Statement” in respect of Articles 16 (1) and Article 16 (2) and “Reservation” in respect of Article 29 (1) of the Convention. Under Article 16 (1) of the Convention, the Government of India declared that it shall take by and ensure these provisions in conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any community without its initiative and consent. Under Article 16 (2) the Government of India declares that it agrees to the principle of compulsory registration of marriages. However, failure to get the marriage registered will not cancel the marriage, particularly in India, with its diversity of customs, religions and literacy level. Article 29 (1) establishes compulsory mediation or adjudication by the International Court of Justice of Disputes concerning interpretation.

The Status of Women in India: Historical and Present View

The history of Indian women has been sensational. In Hindu scriptures the description of a good wife can be seen as a woman, whose mind, speech and body are kept in helplessness, acquires high renown in this

⁷Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2007), *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Asia-Pacific: Linking the Millennium Development Goals with the CEDAW and Beijing Indicators*, Gender and Development Discussion Paper Series No. 20, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok: Thailand, p.4.

world and in the next, the same abode with her husband.⁸Phrase of Manusmriti, “Na StreeSwathantryamArhati” (woman is undeserving for independence), reflects our whole attitude towards women in our country. Manu says women must be held by their protectors in a state of dependence day and night. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is descent traced through males to the rejection of females.⁹

The status of women in India has undergone a windfall change from the Vedic age to till the era of post-modernization and globalization. Historically Indian women are equal to men. In the Indian mythology, even God is regarded as half man, half woman called “*Ardhnarishwara*”. An old Sanskrit proverb is that “*yatranaryastupujyanteramantetatradevta*” means where the women are held in worship there do the Gods be present in. In earlier Vedic age women held higher and honored situation in gender relationship. They were not confined into the four walls of the house, they could attend fairs, festivals and assemblies and also influenced outstanding academic outfit. It is an old saying, “*Where there is women are honoured, there is gods reside.*” Woman was known as “*Ardhangini*” means one half of husband’s body. As a mother, wife and sister, she occupied an honoured place. She is the image of courage and boldness, love and affection, sacrifice and suffering.

‘MatriDevoBhavo’ (Mother of Goddess) is an old sentiment shared by the Indians. Women have been considered as goddesses like Durga, Parvati, Kali, Shakti, Vaishnomata, Bhairavi so on. Indians put them on the pedestal and offer prayers and sacrifices. In contrast, more Goddesses are being killed in the womb, burnt alive for dowry, harassed in workplaces and streets, raped, abducted, exploited and discriminated. Indian citizens venerate and salute this country as ‘Janani’ or mother. On one hand, they worship this mother and on the other hand, they disregard their sisters, mothers and wives. No religious ceremony could bear fruit without her participation.

In Ramayana, when Rama intended to perform the AshwamedhaYajana in the absence of Sita, the religious norms advised him to keep a golden statue of his wife beside him during the ceremony. These epics through ages have become standard 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.

In Mahabaratha epic woman is glorified as a “light of the house, mother of the universe and supporter of the earth and all its forests”. Further it says that there is no guru like the mother means mother is considered

⁸Mace, David and Vera (1960), *Marriage East and west*, Dolphin Books: New York.

⁹The Encyclopedia Britannica (1911), 11th ed., Vol. 28, p. 782

as the first Guru of child. The concept of woman as Shakti, the primal energy force, finds expression in the famous Mahabaratha epic.

In Manusmriti, Manu also writes that, “Where women are verily honored, there the Gods rejoice. Where, they are not honored, there all sacred rites prove useless.” Further, he declared that “In whatever house a woman is not duly honored, that house, with all that belongs to it shall absolutely debase.” The honored status that women enjoyed in the family and society began to undergo radical changes, particularly since the announcement by Manu regarding a woman’s changing position through her life cycle. Manu said that in childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent.

In the post Vedic period, their pedals were pulled in, and they were started to lose their status in society, which they have attained in the Vedic age. She was meant to be protected by the men as her father, brother and husband. She acquired a new identity after marriage.

In this way, the images of woman created by the Hindu lore thus became paradoxical and contradictory to the earlier Vedic, Mahabharata and Ramayana days. She became as a basically weak and dependent person requiring the constant guardianship and protection of man. The most valuable attributes of the woman were marriage, motherhood and service to the husband. A multitude of critical attributes has been ascribed to Hindu women by the writers of the Smritis. She is also prohibited to study the Vedas or perform any sacrifices like the Shudras. She is viewed solely as a mother and wife and never as a woman or a person, and these roles were idealized. A widow is regarded as depressed and she could not participate in socio-religious ceremonies. Re-marriage was not permitted for Hindu high caste widows but the Hindu widower was not subject to such type of restrictions.

During the medieval period, Indian women lost their earlier status and they were at the lowest ebb. Medieval India witnessed enhanced dependency of women on men with the coming of Muslim rule. The socio-economic status of women worsened a lot during the Moghul rule. The Islamic custom of Purdah (veiling of women) forced the public world to be separated from the private world, with women confined to the latter. The practice of veiling was accepted by a large part of the Hindu India. Repeated Muslims invasions pushed the Indian women towards inhuman traditions such as child marriage, the dowry system, purdah, sati and other social evils. The arrival of Islam brought further fall in the status of women.

However, some women left great imprints for their ruling capabilities in this period like Razia Begum, Chand Bibi, Tara Bai, Ahaliya Bai Holker etc. Women like Jahanara, Begum Mumtaz and Noor Jahan enjoyed

respectable positions in the country with the arrival of Islam. These remarkable ladies though strict Muslims, publicly administered justice with their faces covered by veils or burkas.

The religious traditions and social institutions have a deep bearing on the role and status of women. During this period, ‘Bhakti Movement’ also spread all over the country. Women like Mira Bai, Mukta Bai, Jana Bai and others contributed to the spiritual life of the country. Protest movements within the Hindu fold, like Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishvanism, Shaivism and Sikhism contributed to some improvement in the status of women. Sikhism believed in the equality of women and men. The founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak said that “*Within a woman is a man perceived, he is born from a woman, he is married to a woman and with her he goes through life. Why call her bad, she gives birth to kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one true God is exterior to woman.*”

There were also discrimination within women of higher class and common women. Although, during the medieval and English period the common women faced male domination and atrocities but at the higher level a women could become a ruler of her children at the death of her ruler husband, she had the right to get training in war tactics. Maharani Laxmi Bai also known as Queen/Rani of Jhansi, participated in the First War of Independence in 1857.



*Higher Class Women
become a ruler,
had the right to get
training in war tactics*

*Common Women
faced male domination
and atrocities*

During the 19th century, serious efforts were made by social reformers for eradication of social evils and make aware people about gender injustices. Flood gates were open to social reforms during this period. The reform movement successfully eradicated some of the deep rooted evils like Sati.¹⁰Reformist organizations such as BrahmaSamaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, the AryaSamaj set up by DayanandSaraswati in 1875, and Ramakrishna Mission created by Vivekananda in 1897 and individual male reformers like EshwarchandraVidyasagar, Ramakrishna Paramahans, Keshab Chandra Sen, Maharishi Kare,

¹⁰SrivastavaMeenakshi, Singh Kiran and Gaurikaur (1994), “Patterns of age at effective marriage and women’s education”, *Monthly Public opinion survey* 40:3, 36-42.

MahadevRanade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale led the fight against women's oppression by condemning such practices as polygamy, early marriage, enforced widowhood and by advocating female literacy.

During the British period, the attitude, behavior and living pattern of Hindu Society was changed. Reforms were initiated for the upliftment of women. The British rule led to number of socio-religious reforms in the country in order to raise the status of Indian women. The British raised their voice along with Indian reformers to abolish brutal practices against woman, which had placed them at the marginalized position in the society such as: female infanticide, child marriage, enforced widowhood and sati. During this period a good number of social legislations were enforced to modify the structure of society as well as to improve the status of women for instance Widow Remarriage Act 1856, The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 etc.

The situation was also begun to change with the struggle of many national figures for India's freedom as well as women's freedom. The upliftment of women was an important point in the agenda of Mahatma Gandhi. Pyarelal, his secretary, tells that Gandhi often used to say that *he would like to be reborn either as an untouchable or a woman*. These two symbolized the oppressed and the suppressed sections of humanity for him. Mahatma Gandhi openly invited the help from women and many women came forward some of them are Sarojini Naidu, VijayaLaxmiPandit, Mrs. ArunaAsaf Ali. The Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi became a very famous woman in the world. The status of women in India increased a lot with her success. It was proved that women are not inferior to men. Thereafter many women occupied prestigious positions in India. They excelled in almost all fields such as sports, politics, administration, science and arts.

The political atmosphere began to change in India by 1970. Many leading political parties realized the importance of women in their struggle. They raise the issues like rape, wife-battering, divorce, maintenance and child custody along with legislative reforms. Thus the women's movement in India after Independence struggle not only strove for emancipation but also asserted the need for creating a classless socialist society where women can be completely free from fear and violence.

Lawfully men and women are considered to be equal in post-independence but actually the situation is dissimilar.¹¹ Outside the educated elite and often within it, girls are considered as an economic liability because of the tradition that requires a girl's parents to provide her with a dowry at the time of her marriage. During the last few decades sexual harassment at workplace, eve teasing, abduction and female feticide has given a feeling of the horrible behaviour patterns prevailing in the society. The majority of women live a life of dependency that does not possess any self-identity.

¹¹Prakash, N. (2002), *Status of Women in Indian Society-Issues and Challenges in Processes of Empowerment*, Proceedings of the 11th International GASAT Conference, Mauritius, 6-11 July, 2003, p. 249-260.

The Status of Women in India

Encyclopedia Britannica states that *subjection of women was a key principle in India*. Jawaharlal Nehru said that *you can tell the condition of any nation by looking at the status of women within that country*.

Indian society is pre-dominated by men; hence women are a victim of male domination in the every sphere of life. Hence a woman's life lies between pleasures at one end and danger at the other end. In Indian society a woman has been usually defined by sex and they are potential victims of kidnapping, rape, humiliation, torture, exploitation and other kind of crime against them in everyday life. There are many episodes with woman like rape, murder, dowry, burning, wife beating and discrimination in the field of socio-economic, political and educational. India suffers from acute economic and social disparities along regional, rural-urban, social and gender lines. Though, the country's gender gap has increased further due to economic reforms and globalisation.

Many women are suffering from mental and physical tortures in their in-laws' houses. Their husbands demand more and more dowry. They consider their wives as a good source of getting dowry and money. Bride-burning and bride- killing occur every day in India. This is how the status of Indian women is going down. The most widespread and de-humanizing discriminations and attack against women are on the psychological level. The female psyche is being crushed at the very childhood. The female psyche is brutalized long before bodily violence is imposed on her. They are conditioned to accept inferior positions in society. Women from childhood undergo a slow unconscious process of destructive or denial of their self-worth.

Society creates certain thinking patterns in girls at home and in school, through socialization which ascribed to the female sex an inferior status. Gradually society trains them to make this value system their own. Generally bangles, anklets, earrings, necklace etc. are being given to the baby girls so communicating a sense of delicateness. Another result of the socialization or conditioning process is that man either as father; brother or husband considers women as socio economic gift of his household. A woman's value does not judged in terms of her worth as a person with rights and dignity but as in terms of her utility for man. This mentality can be found in each and every society, region and language. For instance, in Hindi, girl is called "*parayadhan*" and boy "*apanadhan*".

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.¹² While India is ranked 119 out of 169 countries in the Global HDI, our estimates for different states range from 99 for

¹² <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/India.pdf>.

the state of Kerala to 133 for Orissa. India, with a global HDI value of 0.504, falls in the category of countries with Medium Human Development. It drops short of the world average, which is 0.624. The loss in global HDI due to inequality is much higher in India (32 percent) than in the world as a whole (22 percent).¹³ As per the Human Development Report HDR 2010 classification the major states of India are distributed between the categories of countries with Low and Medium Human Development. Kerala (with a global HDI of 0.625), Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, West Bengal and Uttarakhand are in the Medium HDI category while other states are in low HDI. Inequality in the distribution of human development is clearly noticeable in India in comparison with the world scenario (Suryanarayana and others 2011).

India is the world's second largest country in terms of total inhabitants; out of a total population approximately 120 million are women living in poverty. India is one of only a few countries globally where males significantly outnumber females, an imbalance which has continued to increase over time with the country's Maternal Mortality Rates (MMRs) in rural areas amongst the highest in the world. The Kiawah trust founded by Peter and Lynne Smitham in 2004 is currently looking to support organisations and/or projects in India focusing on women's empowerment through learning and education. This trust, focuses on the economic and social status of women in eight Indian states, i.e. Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand which jointly known as Empowered Action Group (EAG) states.

14

Status of Women: Major Indicators for Measurement

Mostly status of women is determined by the cultural traditions which deeply influence on the role and status of women. Traditionally, home is the work place of women; they are expected to care of family members from childhood to old age. In the patriarchal society their duties are well defines as good daughters, good wives and good others. Motherhood and wifehood are accepted as key roles for them. The good women should be polite, gentle, caring, loving and ever sacrificing. Girls begin actively participate at the age of six or seven in housework. They are viewed as temporary members of the family and the community while boys are seen as the future of the family. Customarily the role of girls has been secondary in both family and community level. Consequently, the social status of women is less stable than the level of men.

¹³ UNDP (2010), *Human Development Report 2010, The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*, New York, p. 155.

¹⁴Saha, Neepa (2004), *Landscaping women's empowerment through learning and education in India: A Study*, Kiawah Trust.

The status of women can be judged by several measures. Generally women empowerment can be measured by three indicators namely Women's Security, Decision-Making Power and Mobility. These three are significantly low in India particularly for rural and less educated women. Decision-making power among employed urban women is higher than that of rural and less educated women. Older married women had more decision-making power than the younger married women. Younger women and girls experience an additional level of discrimination due to their age.

The Population Crisis Committee (PCC) constructed an Alternative Composite Index (ACI) for this purpose. It is used by the World Bank and the United Nations which focuses on indicators measuring social equality, health, education, employment, marriage and childbearing. These indicators measure status of women in terms of structural change rather than in terms of their welfare afore men. ACI is based on several indicators in eight sectors: Health, Schooling, Adult Education, Labour Force Participation, Conditions of Employment, Domestic Life, Political Representation and Legal Rights which reflecting women issues in both developed and developing countries.



Some other scholars tried to measure the same with the help of a diverse set of indicators. There are a number of broad indicators across Indian states to measure the status of women in the society namely *Survival, Safety, Security (3-S)* besides Education, Health, Participation in Private or Public Decision Making etc.

India suffers from acute economic and social disparities along with regional, rural-urban, social and gender lines. India stands far below in gender related files. Situation is the same in most of the districts of Rajasthan also, but there is successive decrease in some developed districts. Indian society is pre-dominated

by men; therefore women are a victim of male domination in the every sphere of life. They are also not enjoying the independence and self-dependence due to their dependency on male. Before marriage a girl has to under the influence of her father and brother, after marriage her dependence moves to her husband and later on it goes to her son. Means in the journey of life women never ever feel liberty.

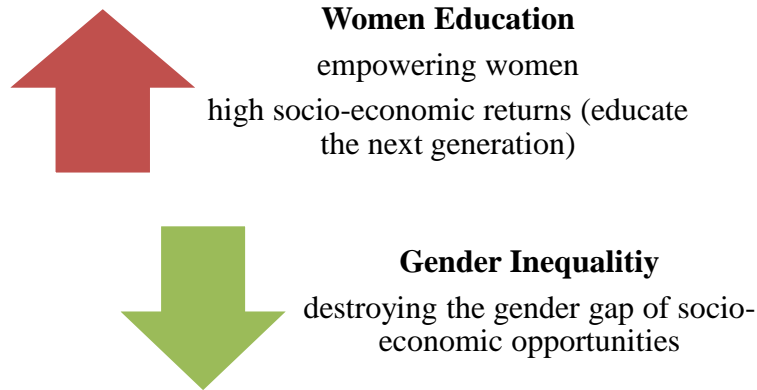
Education and women

Education is one of the key features of encouraging gender equality and widening of women's rights and opportunities. The Constitution of India ensures women education by declaring that every citizen has the right for education, regardless of sex, religion, political convictions, national, race and language belonging. Indian Constitution provides compulsory universal primary education and no legal provisions of any discrimination against women in terms of access to general or higher education. The government of India is laying special emphasis on the education of girls. In the recent competitive examinations, girls have done better performance than boys (KalpanaChawla, Sunita Williams' visit to the space has encouraged the young girls to do more and more research in the field of science).

Education is essential for empowering women and destroying the gender gap of socio-economic opportunities between women and men. It can also reduce gender inequalities and alter the historical legacy of disadvantage faced by women. It is noteworthy that in Rajasthan highest literacy rate of women (in Kota) is less then lowest rate of men's (in Banswara) and there is also difference between the literacy rate of urban and rural female. In poor families where parents cannot afford school education for all children there they prefer boys rather than girls to send to school.

Female education is considered as the best available indicator of women's status due to the difficulty of measuring all aspects of women's status. Many scholars have found that female education is the single most important factor of reproductive behavior.¹⁵ Investing in girls' and women's education produces exceptionally high social and economic returns. Educated women devote more in their children & contribute to the welfare of the next generation.

¹⁵Keya, Pandey (2011), "Socio-economic status of tribal women: A study of a transhumant Gaddi population of Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh, India", *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 3(6), pp. 189-198, June 2011.



Women Health Access

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or illness. Health is being a public good, increases positive benefit to society at large. The prime responsibility of the governments is to ensure the delivery or at least the funding of health systems. It is important to equipping women with the required knowledge and skills to fulfill their health potential are essential to their own well-being as well as their children and families. Deal with gender inequalities in the provision of health services will enable all women and men to enjoy healthier lives and ultimately lead to greater gender equality in all areas. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes that women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest achievable standard of physical and mental health.

Health is still a sensitive area. There is a big gap between the Health Index and the Gender-related Health Index in Rajasthan. Women are still not using the health care facilities and they are resorting home based medicines. Sex ratio, especially in the 0-6 year child ratio is alarming. Today the issue has reached such enormous proportions that a multi-pronged strategy with the single goal of balancing the sex ratio is the need of the hour. This issue requires a mass movement it is not just an issue that can be dealt by a few. The implementation of the law is becoming extremely difficult as sex detection is done within the doctor-patient confidentiality. The only foolproof method to stop this crime of pre-birth sex selection is to bring a change in the mindsets of the people and firm implementation of existing policies.

A wide range of non-health determinants, including socio-economic, environmental and political factors influenced the health status of individuals and populations. The interplay between health and non-health determinants is well captured in the conceptualization of the MDGs. In all regions of the world, women live longer than men. However, this natural advantage of women can be affected by social, cultural, economic, political and other factors. For instance, in developing countries where pregnancy and childbirth can be life-threatening, women's exposure to risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth tend to equalize life

expectancies between the sexes; whereas in developed countries, the taking on unhealthy behaviors by women, such as smoking and drinking, can also equalize life expectancy of men and women.

Economic opportunities and employment for women

Women are employed in various sectors of the economy like industry, education, agriculture, health, physical education and social security construction trade and catering, government agencies and others. But the relative status of women in economic activities is poor than men in the developing world, compared to developed countries, they are exploited at various levels. Increases in per capita income lead to improvements in different measures of gender equality, suggesting that there may be market failures hindering investment in girls in developing countries, and that these are normally overcome as development proceeds. The increasing gender disparity in wages is also noticeable as the women employment in different and lower paying activities. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be raised in society.

Women's economic rights and independence have been promoted comprising their access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources; enable their equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade; offer them business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women; build up their economic capacity and commercial networks; eradicate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination; encourage harmonization of work and family responsibilities for both women and men.

Undoubtedly women's entrepreneurship can provide the fuel for economic growth and opportunity for communities around the world. The Centre for Women's Business Research (CWBR) in the United States conducted a research in over a half a dozen countries and found that women share concerns about the following five challenges: access to information, access to capital, access to markets, access to networks and Validation.

Women Political Participation

Women's inadequate representation and small share in political power is a worldwide problem and not unique in India and Rajasthan. There has been a decline in women's representation in political parties and at the formal government levels (national and local). A World Economic Forum report covering 115 countries notes that women have closed over 90 percent of the gender gap in education and health but when it comes to political empowerment it is at the highest level. Although a number of countries have some sort of gender quota system for government positions. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union IPU women fill only 17 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide and 14 percent of ministerial-level positions. The women

participation in governance leads to the development of local and national policies that are more likely to address the socio-economic and political challenges facing women, their families and disadvantaged groups.

Female political participation would bring noteworthy rewards. In the political field, the reservation for women in local bodies is a significant step forward towards their political empowerment. The World Bank has sponsored a research which shows that countries with a high number of women in parliament enjoy lower levels of corruption. Another World Bank-sponsored study concludes that women are less likely to be involved in corruption and that corruption is less severe where women make up a large share of senior government officials as well as the labor force. Countries that encourage and support the equal participation of women in the workplace as well as at the ballot box have regularly lower levels of corruption and higher standards of living. The countries emerging from war, settlement and reconstruction may settle more rapidly if women are involved in it.



The Constitution of India and women

The Government of Independent India has taken all possible efforts to abolish the difference between men and women. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for removing the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. All citizens of India are guaranteed social, economic and political justice, equality of status and opportunities before the law by the Constitution¹⁶ as showing in table:

S.no.	Articles	Provisions
1	Article 14	Equality before law for women
2	Article 15 (I)	No one can be discriminated on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex & birthplace

¹⁶ Government of India, *Women and Men in India (2001)*, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Central Statistical Organisation, New Delhi and GraminVikasVigyanSamiti GRAVIS (2010), *Women Miners in Rajasthan, India: A Reflection on their life, challenges and future 2010*, Jodhpur, India.

3	Article 15 (3)	The government shall make special provisions for women and children
4	Article 16 (I)	All citizens have equal opportunity for employment and appointment to any office in the government.
5	Article 16 (2)	Forbids discrimination 'in respect of any employment of office under the state' on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any one of them.
6	Article 39 (A)	To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities
7	Article 39 (C)	Men and women doing equivalent work shall receive equivalent wages.
8	Article 39 (D)	Equal pay for equal work for both men and women
9	Article 39 (E)	Citizens should not be compelled out of economic need to perform an activity that is inappropriate for their age, strength, and/or health
10	Article 42	The state to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief
11	Article 46	The state to promote the socio-educational interests of the weaker sections with special care and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation
12	Article 47	The state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health
13	Article 51 (A) (e)	To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to reject the practices which deprecating to the dignity of women
14	Article 243 D (3)	Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the SCs and the STs) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat

15	Article 243 D (4)	Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women
16	Article 243 T (3)	Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the SCs and the STs) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a municipality
17	Article 243 T (4)	Reservation of the offices of chairpersons in municipalities for the SCs, the STs and women in such manner as the legislature of a state may by law provide

The Constitution Framers envisaged the secondary status of women in Rajasthan coupled with an oppressive caste system and never-ending poverty has attacked the women's rights and a life of dignity. Women of Rajasthan are viewed as an economic burden for their natal home as well as marital home. Indistinctness of women's work and lack of negotiating power has contributed to the continuation of negative image in the family and society. Rajasthan had woman as chief minister as well as governor but incidents of atrocities are high against her. They still face both physical assault and mental harassment in a number of ways.

There are many historical, social, cultural, economic, political and geographical reasons responsible for the low status of women in India. Many historical reasons that prescribe the status of Indian women some of them are patriarchal symbolism, ritualism, dualism, marital traditions, caste systems etc. A number of traditions are thousand years old and their impacts have become almost irreparable. Evil customs like Sati, *Pardah*, child marriage, enforced widowhood, dowry system, crept in the society and this led to decline in women's status inside and outside the home. Although women were given high position in scriptures but practically they were considered inferior to men. It was ideally very high but virtually low. Women were prohibited to take part in domestic as well as in external matter. So the status of women in India was not clear in past.

There are certain socio-economic and political factors have been also noticed that are responsible for low status of Indian women and hindrance in the achievement of gender balance. Some of them are the low level of social security, the high level of diseases, lack of essential health care facilities, poor housing, trouble in educating their children, absence of work that would fit their profession, pressures of housekeeping, absence of money, growing poverty and unemployment of women, insufficient access to credit, declining women participation in decision making and property distribution, limited access to political activities, lack

of gender approaches in politics and mass consciousness, undeveloped training system of women leaders, ignoring of gender methodology etc.

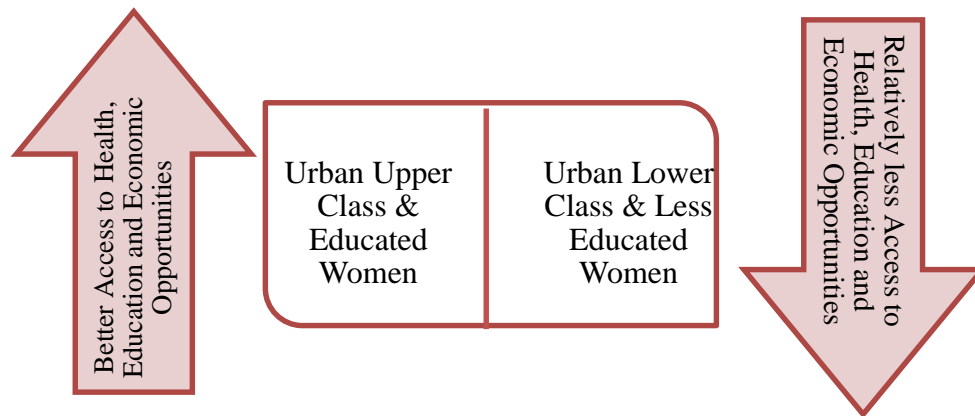
The socio-cultural and religious construction of role and status of women is responsible for emerging discrimination against women. Usually in Indian society women have been defined by sex and they are potential victims of kidnapping, rape, humiliation, torture, exploitation and other kind of crime against them in everyday life. They face high rates of violence and their security is also vulnerable by the multiple forms of violence. There are many cases with woman like domestic violence, marital violence, street violence, dowry related deaths, wife beating, bride-burning and bride-killing and slapping, rape, gang rape, murder, women trafficking, sexual abuse and social, economic, political and educational discrimination etc. These all contribute in the low status of women in India. Son preference is another commonly practiced phenomenon in many parts of North India which is directly linked with sex-selective abortion and discrimination of girl children in access to health, nutrition, and education. This is how the status of Indian women is going down.

The low status of women in India is also heavily dependent on many other different variables including geographical location (urban/rural), social status (caste and class), educational status and age. Women's security, decision-making power and mobility are three indicators for women's empowerment and these three are significantly low in India especially for rural and less educated women. Decision-making power among employed urban women is higher than among rural and less educated women. Age is also determining factor as older married women have more decision-making power than the younger married women means younger women and girls experience an additional layer of discrimination due to their age.

Among rural and urban women the caste and class divisions along with education hold back women's empowerment. Women (both urban and rural) who have some level of education have higher decision making power in the household and the community. Furthermore, the level of women's education also has a direct implication on maternal mortality rates, and nutrition and health indicators among children. Rural women, face much higher rates of inequality in all spheres of life. Urban women particularly, urban educated women enjoy relatively higher access to education, health and economic opportunities and experience less domestic violence.

Social divisions among urban women also have a similar impact on empowerment indicators. Some level of education among women of lower caste and class has shown a positive impact on women's empowerment indicators. Urban upper class and educated women have better access to health, education and economic opportunities, whereas lower class, less educated women enjoy significantly less these rights. Nonetheless urban Indian girls and women are at high risk of gender-based violence. Street violence in urban

centres is a growing concern for young women and girls, who are increasingly moving away from rural areas for economic opportunities and higher education.



Status of women could only be raised if their social, economic and political status is improved. Many women are poorly informed about their rights and stereotypes and traditions formed by the patriarchal way of life are still strong in the society. It is crucial to ensure that women can participate in decision making in all management, professional and political arenas on equal footing with men. It could be possible only by adopting definite policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. There is a need to increase the number of women in decision making positions as well as in economic activities to advance the economic and political empowerment of women.

There is a most visible gap in policy and practice in the betterment of status of women in India. One key factor for this gap is the patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in both rural and urban India. Another gap is the inaccessibility of information on victims' rights mainly among rural and less educated women. Corruption widened the gap in enforcement of laws and sentencing of perpetrators is long and difficult process. Furthermore, social stigma and the fear of rejection by the family play a big role in women and girls' ability or inability to access laws and policies to address sexual and physical violence.

Despite the constitutional provisions, policies, laws and initiatives by civil society institutions, status of women is low in India. Formulating laws is not enough but effective steps are required to strictly enforce them. Even many People still never thought the need of equal rights of women with men's in making decisions on political, economic and other issues. We need to rethink concepts and strategies for promoting women's dignity and rights. The society prerequisites open discussion of traditions and customs with participation of both men and women in the way that will allow bettering protecting women's rights.

Although many International, national, regional organizations, United Nations Commission has listened the voice of women to solve the gender discrimination problem. A number of important measures

have been taken to institutionalise support to women like the State Commission was created on the Issues of Family and Women, the network of non-governmental organizations is being strengthened, and mechanism of review of legislation from the gender viewpoint is in place. But in spite of many government initiatives, experience has shown that the outcomes in terms of changes in position of women have been weak. There is still a long way to go in gender-sensitizing.

The Government of India (GoI) has taken many efforts to abolish the difference between men and women. It has two main bodies working on national and state level to advance gender equality these are the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women. The first has widely implemented local level micro-finance schemes to advance economic opportunities for rural women. The second has been instrumental in creating legislative changes, and has set up Complaint and Investigate Cells at the state level. The Grievance Cells receive complaints of gender-based violence and are mandated to investigate, provide referrals, counselling and ultimately report on such cases.

The Indian Constitution protects the norm of gender equality through various articles. According to our constitution men and women are equal before law. The Decade of Nineties was the Decade for Policy Makers with the condition of women not improving with the surplus of programmes. They designed and implemented programmes and policies in a hurry in the eighties. The central and the state government suddenly woke up to the need of policy making under international and national pressure which was considered to be the first step in bringing about gender equity. It was started with the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution.

We started giving special attention to the causes of women with the establishment of the National Commission for Women in 1990 for considering the grievances and preventing the atrocities against women. It is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Now Bodies like the State Commission for Women, the National Human Rights Commission, the State Human Rights Commission and a number of voluntary organizations, women's rights activists, women NGOs, civil society institutions, women's agency etc. are also very active on the same issues. But a better networking among these bodies is needed. A larger Commission with more powers to interfere in cases of atrocities against women and play a greater role in policy making and their implementation could be useful. The State Human Rights Commission could be more active. They have a much larger number of cases instituted by men than women.

The central government also announced a policy for the empowerment of women. But it is seen that the machineries for the implementation of the policy for women development continue to be small and headed by relatively junior ministers and civil servants. The state government announced a Programme for Action for

Children and followed it up with the Population Policy and then Policy for Women. It also set up the State Commission for Women almost half a decade after the setting up of the National Commission for Women. The government is laying special emphasis on the girls' education. Thus women have done better performance than men in the recent competitive examinations. The empowerment of women by building their capabilities, confidence and decision-making can provide them opportunities to manage their development.

Women's NGOs are also essential part of the gender equality, women empowerment and raising status of women. Their main aims are to support the socially vulnerable groups of women, children and the establishment of gender balance, especially in the resolution of unemployment and poverty problems. Women's participation in NGO has been accepted as an important tool for women empowerment and gender equality. They act as development actors and are driving forces for reaching gender equality.

It is an unquestionable fact that communication media can play a significant role if they project a dynamic image of women rather than highlight traditional attitudes. Efforts should be made to cover every nook and corner of the country through communication network. This could remove prejudices and stereotypes, accelerating the acceptance of women's new and growing roles in the society, and promoting their integration into the development process as equal companions. It will also create awareness amongst the women about their rights.

Gender budgeting is also a right move of the state to mainstream gender issues but it requires participation of all departments including power, irrigation, revenue, home, I.T. and others. An effective MIS system for monitoring women welfare programmes needs to be developed with a simple and transparent check list, which can be handled by both government and non-government functionaries. An integrated system into the state plan is a need of the overall decentralization of planning process where village, block, tahsil and district level plans ensure participation of women. More effective publicity of government welfare schemes requirements to be undertaken using multimedia and participatory processes. Training of women in leadership is essential at all levels and gender sensitization should no more remain tokenistic. Gender Resource Centres must be funded and set up with active participation of academicians and activists.

Women's work needs greater recognition in all government policy. The State needs to look beyond the parameters of mere service delivery of education, health and income for a full functioning of women's capabilities. Joint patta for men and women made compulsory for women's better control over resources. Their experiences must be perceived as legitimate in the larger public discourse. More time and space needs to be devoted to allow for their expression, whether it is in training or in data collection efforts. Female headed house-holds should be given special and close attention. There is need to deliberate and design a gender audit

system for all government and non-government programmes, which would look at targets, trainings, recruitments, promotion, infrastructure and decision making opportunities for women.

Creating an environment is essential for complete development of women through positive policies. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres viz. political, economic, social, cultural and civil. Women's equal access to participation and decision making in social, economic and political life, health care, occupational health and safety, social security, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration etc. are also necessary. Strengthen legal system, changing the societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of men and women, mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process, partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations are also essential.

There is a growing need to develop a sociological approach that status of women should be basically viewed as a unit of social systems, also stratification systems and their ideologies. Moreover, how strongly one dimension of women empowerment is related to other dimensions is itself variable across social contexts. In some settings, different dimensions of empowerment tend to rise and fall together much more closely than in other settings. Appropriate measures must be undertaken to provide women and men with equal conditions for realizing their full rights to participate in the development process and at the same time gain from it to ensure that they will equally contribute and benefit from the economic, political, environmental and socio-cultural development of the country.

Status of women is not only the issue of women's but both men and women. There is an urgent need to redefine the power relationships, challenging gender stereotypes and traditions, disabling barrier to equality etc. for achieving gender equality. Equal and serious changes in women's mentality are also needed because it is a woman who raise her children and make them follow stereotypes. This vicious cycle can only be broken if work is done by both side from men's and women's. According to Baan ki Moon "*Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns. Peace agreements that include women are more successful. Parliaments with more women take up a wider range of issues including health, education, anti-discrimination, and child support*".

Almost twenty three years into the new century, the scales of status equality continue to be tilted against women in Rajasthan. Woman has just started assuming a misty appearance. If access is the criterion; she is still unable to reach health care facilities as easily as her male relatives do, upper primary or high school is still a distant goal for her. Although her work participation rates in the field of gainful employment in the

rural areas continue to go up, but she is still working in the field as an unpaid worker, most of her jobs are in the low paying primary sector and the tertiary sector is out of her reach. She still does not automatically get rights on the land under the Hindu Succession Act. She has got into positions of political power in the villages and towns, but her representation in the state assemblies and the parliament is still one of the lowest in the world.

Today, women are emerging as leaders in the fields of aeronautics, medicine, space, engineering, law, politics, education, business one can just name the profession and they are there, all are burning need of today's world in their empowerment. The empowerment process has already been started in India. We are now witness of a steady improvement in the enrolment of women in schools, colleges and even in professional institutes like health, education, political participation and representation in governance.

Although policies related to women have had a positive path in the past few decades with the central as well as state government voicing many progressive measures to advance gender equality and raise status of women. But still there are continuous demands of better laws, provisions, and policies and also accountability for their implementation to address and readdress gender discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women. There is also continual need of government welfare schemes, social defence mechanisms, women independency and self-dependency, decision-making power, education, health, economic opportunities, political participation and representation in governance, dynamic role of communication media and other state and private institutions regarding it. In addition creating an environment is essential for the whole development process through positive efforts.

The women can get back their rightful place in society if law is properly imposed to check male-superiority. The State requires a fully-fledged mechanism to ensure gender sensitive policy and implementation through a participatory apex body. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage or family, no ward or stick is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths.

A society where ideas of men superiority is predominant can only be altered by change in state authority and mentality of men as well as women, formulating and implementing strong laws etc. There should be a strong determination among every man that every woman should be honored only then empowerment will be realized in its true meaning. Robert Kennedy said "The glory of justice and the majesty of law are created not just by the Constitution nor by the courts, nor by the officers of the law, nor by the lawyers, but

by the men and women who constitute our society, who are the protectors of the law as they are themselves protected by the law”.