CHAPTER I

ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic advancement of a country can best be judged by the status and position of its women. The main characteristic feature of economic development is the process towards an increasingly intricate pattern of labour specialization. As economic development advances people become specialized in particular tasks and the economic autarky of the family group is superseded by the exchange of goods and services.¹

Economic development in our times has come to be associated with the 300 year old western industrialism. The major feature of this type of economic development has been as Karl Polanyi says, "a new method of allocating resources on a national system of free markets".² This is a significant departure from the past, because in the past, resource allocation was based on reciprocity and redistribution. Markets had existed before but were local and based on barter rather than on cash transactions. In these local markets women could also participate even while looking after their children. But in the present system they are substantially left out. Women have been mainly producers of goods which have greater 'use value'. However, with increasing importance

being attached to 'exchange value' the goods produced by women have been overlooked and undervalued.³

The place of women in the socio-economic structure of society has been undergoing gradual but steady change during the past few centuries in almost all countries of the world. The degree of change has however varied from country to country. These changes have been influenced more by the changing socio-economic structure and the pace of economic development that overlook the society in these countries. Consequently we find today a marked difference in the status of women and especially that of working women between developed and developing countries. In developed countries the position of women is more secure, well defined and established in labour market than their counterparts in underdeveloped countries to secure some basic benefits and privileges.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

After the Second World War, in almost every industrialized country, not only has the female labour force gone up but it has also undergone far remarkable structural change. The age and composition of the female labour force has changed and there has been a shift from agricultural and industrial occupations to the service sector white collared jobs.

The percentage of women in the labour force in these countries ranges from approximately 30 per cent to 48 per cent, being the highest in the centrally planned economies. Since 1950 the increase has been from 30 to 50 per cent. This is shown in Table 1.1.

### Table 1.1

**Women's Share in the Labour Force in Selected Industrialized Countries, 1982**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Country</th>
<th>Women's Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.R.G.</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxenbourg</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Economies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.S.R.</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Socialist Countries</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1.2
Composition of Labour Force by Gender and Main Sector of Activity 1970 and 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major economic region</th>
<th>Percentage of females in</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialized market economies</td>
<td></td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, even within the developed countries there is considerable variation in the pattern of female labour participation rates during the period 1950-75. According to OECD study, they can be broadly divided into three groups:

(1) Where the female employment has been steeply increasing. These are Australia, Canada, France, Sweden and the U.S. In these countries women's participation ratio has increased more than 33 per cent, partly because before World War II in these countries it was rather low.

(2) Where the female participation rates have been more or less stable, since it was high from the very beginning, Denmark, Finland fall in this group.

(3) Where proportion of working women declined in relation to the level maintained earlier in the century - consisting of Belgium, Italy and Japan.

Besides the fact of increasing number of women going for paid employment, the OCED study\(^5\) further points out the following special features about women in the labour market in these countries:

(a) The discrimination in pay is according to sex still continues in developed countries in spite of legislations prohibiting the same.

(b) The discrimination in pay is brought more by assigning certain jobs to women and keeping these jobs paid e.g., the sectors given to women, such as textiles, nursing, primary school teaching and office work are still underpaid.

(c) Women have a higher rate of inter-labour force than men while they have a lower rate of intra-labour force turnover.

(d) Absenteeism of women is higher than that of men. But in better jobs it is less.

\(^5\) Ibid.
(e) Women have been found to experience more unemployment than men at least in 14 out of 16 OECD countries.

(f) Women unlike men are often found to take up part-time employment.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

While women in all countries of the world alike are generally confronted within a discriminating attitude in various degrees on grounds of sex in matters of employment opportunities and working conditions and this is more true in case of developing countries. This discrimination possibly emanates from a conservative view about women's proper role in society. It also come from situations of chronic unemployment where the prospects of a large scale entry of women in the labour market is regarded as potential cause of economic disorganisation. A typical manifestation of this attitude is the theory of women's marginal role in the economy.

It is only the advent of Ester Boserup's "Women's Role in Economic Development" 1970 illustrated the fact that economic development, triggered off by westernized capitalist production process, has impoverished the economic status of women in both absolute and relative sense, particularly in the less developed Third World countries. About a third of the world's labour force at present is composed of women.
But discrimination against women in employment and wage is more or less a universal phenomenon. An interesting survey of women's situation in different parts of the world has been made by U.N. Centre for Economic and Social Information in connection with the International Women's Year in 1975. According to this survey, women for the most part, neither fully participate, nor share equally in the benefits of economic and social progress and development. The proportion of women in paid employment is very restricted in the Asian, African and Latin American countries where agriculture of the traditional type provides the main avenue for employment.

Participation of women in economic activity is common to all countries and their role in the process of economic development has been recognised throughout. However, the extent of their participation depends upon a number of factors such as the nature of the economy, social conventions, level of literacy, attitude towards women's work, etc. But the problem is more serious in developing countries where women's work is regarded as supplementary in nature and women enter the employment market only when economic conditions force them to do so. Naturally, employers have taken advantage of this and paid discriminating wages rendered discriminatory treatment. However, attitude towards employment of women have changed during the last 50 years and more and more protective legislations are being passed. The ILO has adopted
several conventions in this regard which have been ratified by member countries including India.

If one looks at the position of women in the developing countries, one can directly question about the type of economic development and for whom? The position of the developing countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia is very much conditioned by the hangover of the colonial era. Commercialization through the growth of exports of primary commodities led to a retarded growth of the industrial sector and brought into existence a dual economy in most of these countries. The degradation of forests and soils through their exploitative use by the colonial powers for procurement of cheap raw materials led to the impoverishment of people in these regions of which women have been the most hard hit. With commercialization and emergence of private property, men have also been deprived of their access to resources but women have been deprived of it more.

The major characteristic feature of women in the developing countries is their predominant role in agriculture. In Table 1.2, it is shown that more than 65 per cent of women in these countries are engaged in agriculture and only 16 to 17 per cent in industry or services.

Hence, it is not surprising that most of the studies on women in the developing countries look at their position in
the rural areas and their labour contribution in different agricultural processes. The aim of such studies is to show women's work and worth in the LDC's, which is really invisible and severely devalued. Some attribute this to the coincidence of interests between capital and policy makers. According to them this "has resulted in the creation of a female domain in subsistence agriculture responsible for reproducing and nurturing a large reserve army of cheap labour". 6

Case studies regarding the role of women in agriculture in different developing countries are now available. Thus in Central Nigeria it is found that female's contribution is 100 per cent in case of weeding, storage and processing (except in case of rice where it is 50:50) for all crops. Their contribution to field preparation, planting and harvesting varies from crop to crop being 100 per cent for millet, sorghums and sesame. Murdock and Provost's standard cross cultural sample of 185 societies shows that weeding, harvesting, milking, care of small animals, burden carrying, fuel gathering and water fetching are performed by women. 7 Similar studies are available for most of the countries of Asia. 8

These show that in most of the Asian countries women work from 14 to 17 hours a day, food preparation, water fetching, etc., accounts for 30 per cent of the time spent on working. These studies show the amount of work women do yet most of it goes undervalued in an economy which puts premium on market work.

More interesting than the time disposition studies are those which show that the penetration of capital in developing countries have effected women in a complex way. In the matrilineal state of Nigeria, Sembilan in Malaysia, for example, women fought and retained their rights to rice lands and also increased their ownership of rubber lands as well.

Yet the formal ownership of land alone has not been able to fetch economic independence for these women.9

In contrast in Sudanese rural areas, women do not have any ownership rights and there too with the process of development and migration of women to urban areas, women are left with the unequal struggle for survival.10

Studies of women in Iran and Bangladesh where hold of Islam and practice of Purdah excludes women, show that when women are separated from access to the cash economy and when

they need male intermediaries they are subordinated. The only way in which they are able to lighten their burden is by high fertility in general and production of sons in particular which also provides them status. Only landless women who have to go for wage employment tend abandon high fertility.\textsuperscript{11,12}

The case of Jakarta (Indonesia) shows that the industrialists who have invested capital in the villages have entered into an alliance with the Islamic patriarchs. The latter are used as labour agents who get women labourers for factories at a low wage rate.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus economic development has not been an unmixed blessing for women in the developing countries rather and it has worsened their lot. Women are seen working even larger hours. They are forced to walk greater distance to get firewood and water or work extra hours in others' field where cash crop is grown. They have no time to produce the surpluses that women have traditionally produced to pass on to the next generation. In specific developing regions even I.L.O. studies suggest that the standard of living was higher a century or more ago. Particularly in the African continent a shortage of basic food stocks has appeared where earlier there were

\textsuperscript{13} Celio Mather, "Rather than Make Trouble, Its Better Just to Leave" behind the lack of industrial strife in the Tangerang region of West Java in Haleh Afshar (ed), Op.cit.
adequate quantities of food.  

Thus, regardless of the various differences among developing countries, the radical transformation of the position of women in those countries should be essentially connected with women's dimensional changing position in the world at large. Most developing countries should strive to include plans and emphasise on greater participation for women of all races for the full integration of women into development in all fundamental elements of their developmental strategies. The overall institutional structure established to develop and support contribution of women among developing countries should tackle tactfully the problems of women's developmental role, which presupposes an adequate and unbiased evaluation and social recognition of their work.

WOMEN IN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Women constitute an integral part of our socio-economic life and actively participate in socio-economic development. Their role in economic development was not seriously taken but "women and development" as a subject entered the international scene around 1970, "when the hidden" economic and social contribution of women began to be uncovered from underlayers of social mythology. The declaration of the

International Women's Year by the United Nations General Assembly in 1975 could be considered a turning point regarding the place, role and position of women in society. Since then it has come to be recognised that half of humanity in every community is connected with development.

Today women actively contribute in the promotion of economic development in different capacities namely housewife, mother, labourers, officers, scientists, technocrats and executives, etc. 'Now-a-days their work is not confined only to family and household chores but has also extended to work in fields, factories, offices, administration, science and technology. With the spread of education, training and technology their mobility has increased and they have come out of their shells to do different work to raise the living standards of their families.'

They directly contribute in the production systems of the nation by their work in fields and factories. They fend food for menfolk in the fields perform as workers, professionals and executives. Apart from being producers, processors and distribution of food to their families, they are earners of cash income which goes towards the fulfilment of basic needs and supplements family income. In this process savings are augmented which is an important component needed for development. Women have therefore a dual productive economic role as unpaid labourers at home and in the fields and as paid
labourers outside home. They are not playing only supplementary role but their role in economic development is vital, positive and essential. In an important way, women, with child bearing and proper child rearing, are helping in the development of human capital.

It is true that all women from all classes are not involved in these tasks. The patterns differ for classes/castes of women. Broadly speaking the lower class/caste women are generally engaged in manual work in fields, construction work, public work, etc. It is now being found that a number of urban poor women run their own petty business to support their families. It has been brought to light that poorer section women have to work for supporting families even outside the family. In urban areas women are either employed for wages or engaged in cottage industries, self-employed professions, run business and work in offices, banks, administration, etc. Among the employed women, the well educated mostly people with higher classes/castes are considered 'leisured class women', while those of the lower categories are tied down to never ending cycle of work and activities. They have to work for many more hours and are doubly burdened both inside the home and outside it for earning and thereby supplementing family income. Majority of the women from socially depressed classes/communities extensively participate in hard and degrading jobs.
Women play more pronounced and crucial role in agriculture sector in our economy. According to M.N. Srinivas, rural women can be classified into four classes, namely, (i) women belonging to big land owner families who engage labour to cultivate their lands assume supervisory jobs; (ii) women belonging to small land holding households who personally cultivate their lands with or without the services of labour; (iii) women belonging to tenant share cropper artisan households; and (iv) agricultural labourers who are subsist entirely on hiring themselves for labour work.

The first category of women are always not in labour work outside their own homes, while category four women are always in labour work in addition to burden of their home work. In our country in spite of more than three decades of planned development, organised sector provides only about 12-15 per cent employment to women. So they mostly find job in agriculture and allied activities. The rural female cultivators and agricultural labourers comprised 37 per cent and 50 per cent respectively in the female work force in 1981.

WORK PARTICIPATION

The contribution of women in economic development is gauged

by their work participation rate. "Participation rate is usually measured in terms of proportion of workers to total population". An important index on assessing the role of women in the economic structure is the work participation rate. The female work participation rate has declined slowly from 1901 to 1961. But in 1971, there was a sudden fall due to change in the definition of the 'worker' and the same continued even in 1981 also. The differences of the work participation rates between male and female are shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3

Work Participation Rates in India (1901-1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981*</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* excluding marginal workers

Source: Registrar General India.

From Table 1.3, it is clear that a large part of the decline in the female participation in economic activity is real and only a small part of it caused by conceptual changes in the definition of workers introduced from census to census.

When we examine the data regarding main workers and marginal workers in the economy as per census data 1981, we get a clear picture of the contribution of women in different economic activities in the country, which is shown in Table 1.4.

It is evident from Table 1.4 that out of 100 female main workers, about 33 are cultivators, more than 46 are agricultural labourers and nearly 5 are engaged in household industry. We see that out of 100 male main workers about 44 are cultivators, 20 are agricultural labourers, about 9 are engaged in other than household industry and 7 in trade and commerce. It logically follows from this that women work mainly in primary sector as cultivators and agricultural workers but their counterparts are even going outside for jobs and are employed in other occupations in comparatively larger numbers. In the category of marginal workers we witness that out of every 100 females, nearly 48 and 41 work as cultivators and agricultural labourers respectively. In household industry about 4 of them are engaged. From the above it is amply demonstrated that even today women mostly
### Table 1.4
Percentage Distribution of Workers and Marginal Workers 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Main workers Males</th>
<th>Main workers Females</th>
<th>Marginal workers Males</th>
<th>Marginal workers Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>43.70</td>
<td>33.20</td>
<td>41.66</td>
<td>47.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>46.18</td>
<td>33.29</td>
<td>41.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations, orchards and allied activities</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying, manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Household industry</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Other than household industry</td>
<td>8.92</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade, commerce, transport, storage</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>9.22</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1981 (Taken from An Analysis of the Situation of Children in India, UNICEF, New Delhi, 1984, p.77).
find themselves engaged in agricultural and allied activities. In factory, trade, transport, etc., their number is still very low. They contribute more to agricultural development, than to the development of other sectors in the economy. About 80 per cent of female workers are engaged in agriculture as labourers or cultivators. It should also be born in mind that the participation data for women do not include the majority of rural women who spend their time and effort in the collection of fuel, fodder and vegetables which are neither for direct consumption by family or are sold to meet the family's other needs. Similarly, women who help in family occupations like dairying, poultry farming, raising and maintenance of kitchen gardens, sewing, weaving and similar subsistence level of occupations are not caused.

But it is difficult for many of us today to understand that the full time housewife is a recent actor in history. Over much of human history, women have been engaged in production. What was different was the nature and organisation of production. Much of the current skewness in work force participation occupied over the last century. The participation of males in the work force has also declined, but this is closely associated with the growth of male population being faster than their absorption in the labour force. But the reduction was mainly due to substitution by male labour, the reasons are:
(i) Technological change altering the occupational structure in ways that favour males accompanied by the absence of expansion in these sectors of the economy where female labour is already employed;

(ii) Growing unemployment and sluggish growth of income per capita resulting in insufficient opportunities for potential female workers. Between 1961-81, it was the displacement of female workers by male workers which was the most dominant over time and space as compared to other factors such as (a) changes in the ratio of female workers to total workers and (b) changes in the aggregate level of employment that could account for the decline.

The decline in the female labour force was most pronounced in Punjab, approximating 90 per cent while it ranges between 58 per cent and 68 per cent in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

Dowry, increasing violence against women and general devaluation of women through various forms of exploitation are the primary manifestations of these new disorders. We may not have 'Sati' or child marriage or female infanticide on the scale witnessed in earlier centuries, but we have brides burnt for fulfilment of dowry and female foeticide to satisfy son preference. There is a persistent and continuing discrimination against women among all classes but especially against poor women making for unequal access to social resources crucial
for being effective human beings in education, health and employment.

Many studies corroborate the fundamentally subordinate position of women in the unorganised sector and their easy exploitability. Because, women aim to make up a deficit in the family level of income which is already very low they are normally prepared to take up any work and at any rate. Employers are able to take advantage of the short-term consideration of women workers, as also the absence of alternatives for them by hiring them at wages far below their productivity. This sexual division of tasks has no rationale and had a little connection with the special biological risk of women because child bearing and child rearing in reality are given no recognition, women work at hard tasks during pregnancy and when motherhood creates special needs they are deprived of even their ordinary needs. The shift of workers between occupation has little effect on relative wages so 'overcrowding' by women is not the real cause of low wages.

Women accept any family taboos about work even if it means for going opportunities but where there are new occupations and no taboos have been established. Women are more easily able to make an entry. However, even then, the prejudices of employers can create inequalities. The upshot of it all is that women's presence in paid employment is subject to discrimination because of the fundamental structure
of inequality between men and women. At the same time, paradoxically, women's family obligations are so strongly laid that the ultimate responsibility for family survival which also implies economic responsibility, rests on their shoulders. The main purpose of women's work being to keep the family intact, it maintains male dominance within the household. Women are 'allowed' to work when the family needs their income, not because they have the right to do so; what work they can do and on what terms they do it, is influenced by gender, not economies.

In most rural households women are exclusively responsible for the provision of three vital needs - fuel, fodder and water. This traditionally has been their role. But now, since environmental degradation due to deforestation and industrialisation has eroded the forest resources for fuel and fodder, women need to walk many miles more for collecting these necessities. Acute water shortage has thrust the ones 'self sufficient' villages into permanent drought regions. Among the reasons cited are extensive soil erosion due to deforestation and cash crops taking up enormous proportions of available water. As a result, water tables have been badly upset and women end up being the worst sufferers.

This results in migration as one of the desperate methods employed in the struggle for survival by both men and women.
But migration as a solution, is problematic and often increases hardships for both men and women, women migrants are incorporated only into the peripheral sectors of economic activity. Poverty, widowhood, desertion by men then makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Then men migrate alone, for the women staying back, more often than not, this results in extra economic responsibility and less help available.

Technology, the most crucial resource for development today is also not gender neutral. While the new technologies in certain spheres have increased the household income of women of some classes, they have simultaneously thrown other women out of employment. Even where more employment and household income has accrued to women it has not necessarily altered their status as pointed out by enumerable micro studies. A woman becoming an earner and adding to the family alter fundamental inequalities in terms of control over crucial resources, authority, decision making and freedom of choice.

But technology can also serve humanity by lightening physical toil. A great deal of women's work in arduous and very little has been done to lighten the drudgery of the tasks done exclusively by women, like fetching fuel, water, cooking, washing, etc., all of which take away a good deal of women's time. As the economy moves from the subsistence
to the modernized monetised sector, women are often the worst losers.

SOCIAL STATUS

In ancient India particularly during the vedic age women enjoyed a high status in the home as well as outside. Women played a significant role in all fields including the cultural, social, religious and political. Many of them became poetesses, mathematicians and theologians. Purdah system and child marriage were unknown. They had perfect freedom and effective in social customs. A man could marry one woman and polygamy was rare. Widow remarriage was permitted. The position underwent a change in the later vedic age, although women were still respected. Yet they did not have the same freedom as before. The birth of a daughter was not quite welcome and she had not right in the ancestral property. In the Mourya and Gupta periods the position deteriorated further and other evils such as purdah system also came in and the female education suffered. This continued during the Mughal period, although Akbar the Great, tried to stop child marriage and Sati and permitted remarriage of widows. In the beginning of 19th century, the position of women in India was indeed degrading the deplorable. The marriage of girls at an early age was the prevalent custom. This deprived the girls of any opportunity of receiving any education worth
the name. For a widow beyond a bare maintenance, there was no right to the property of her dead husband and she could not marry again.

These customs and traditions and practices reduced women to the position of a liability and forced them to a life of unhealthy discrimination. It is for this reason that almost all the important social reforms of the 1914 century centred round women. All the celebrated reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Gopala Krishna Gokhale and Sri Sayyad Ahmed Khan were valiant champions of women's social liberation. They raised their powerful voice against inhuman and oppressive social customs, such as purdah system, practice of Sati, child marriage, polygamy, enforced widowhood, dowry system, etc. As a result education was promoted among women, female infanticide and Sati were prohibited and widow remarriage was legalised. Efforts to stop polygamy were not equally successful though its rigors were considerably minimised. All the shocking customs were either altogether abolished or were in a process of steady decline by the beginning of the 20th century.

With the advent of independence, a new impetus was given to social reforms for women. The Constitution granted them equality of status and opportunity and the fact that there
should be no discrimination on grounds of sex enshrined in the fundamental rights of the Constitution. The directive principles of State policy empowered the State to make special provisions for the progress of women. There are in fact a wide range of constitutional and legal provisions to protect and safeguard the interests of women from exploitation. Legal disabilities with regard to marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, adoption, etc., have also been removed by the enactment of laws such as Special Marriage Act of 1954, Hindu Succession Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, Abolition of Dowry Act of 1961, etc.

In the past four decades, the country has made spectacular strides in the profession of academic body in India, where women have not entered and have not made a mark. Women have held outstanding positions. In civic bodies eminent women have been elected as mayors in metropolitan cities. There are women Ministers, Legislators, Judges, Lawyers, Engineers, Architects, Writers and Artists. Women have increasingly started venturing into new avenues of public and private employment, such as the Indian Administrative Services, the Indian Police Services, as mountaineers, pilots, etc. An analysis of the occupational data of females as revealed by 1981 census shows that women are taking to occupations which were hitherto considered male oriented. The number in each select occupation is engineers, technologists and surveyers
(3,941), engineering technicians (7,138), physicians and surgeons (53,868), lawyers (3,682), administration and executive officials, government and local bodies (10,071), miners (34,916), electrical fitters and electronic workers (17,386) and transport equipment operators (18,286). In broadcasting and television, several women find themselves in executive positions. Thus women are beginning to influence the functioning of the mechanism of the State in several spheres.

From times immemorial women in India have been working in the active economic fields and at homes though not in the strict sense of earning wages. The traditional village community in India consisted of the cultivators, the artisan, and those of performing memorial services. In each of these the women played a distinctive and accepted role in the process of earning a livelihood for the family putting in sometimes more, sometimes less but often an equal amount of labour in both production and marketing of products of agriculture and handicrafts. In the early days of industrialisation womenfolk belonging to the lower strata of the society sought employment in the plantations, mines and factories which had a strong rural base. In agriculture women have been traditionally working shoulder to shoulder with man. With the planned economic development and spread of industria-
lisation in the post-independence era, the participation of women in economic activity was quite marked. Articles 16(1) and 16(2) of the Constitution grant the right of equal opportunities in regard to employment to women along with men without any distinction. The constitutional and legal measures have been taken not only to protect women from exploitation but also to secure their increasing participation in different fields.

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

Various studies have shown that women are becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and capabilities. However, the demographic features of female population like excessive mortality in female children resulting in persistent decline in the sex ratio, low rate of literacy and low economic status stress the need for greater attention to the economic emancipation of women. The low status in large segments of Indian society cannot be raised without opening up of opportunities of independent employment and income for them. But the purpose of change to raise the status of women under various spheres of socio-economic activities would require sustained effort over a period of time.

Under different five year plans, general as well as special programmes taken up for the welfare of women and also to cater to their special requirements. A wide network of
maternity and child health centres and family welfare centres were established. An attempt to integrate the family welfare programme as general health services has been made. Prophylaxis against nutritional anaemia amongst mothers and immunisation of pregnant women against tetanus has been taken up long with prophylaxis against blindness in children caused by vitamin 'A' deficiency and immunisation against diptheria, whooping cough, tetanus and polio for children. Special nutrition programmes to provide nutritional supplements to the most vulnerable group of pregnant and nursing mothers and the children of the age group 0-5 and nutrition education has been made a basic component of supplementary nutrition, health and education programmes have been provided.

Emphasis has been laid on increasing the enrolment of girls in schools by providing various incentives. Functional literacy as part of the National Adult Education Programme as well as under the Integrated Child Development Services, projects have been given special emphasis. The Equal Remuneration Act aims to estimate discrimination in remuneration against women. Labour laws have been made to provide for material benefits and creches in units employing women.

Social welfare programmes cater to the special needs of women who by reason of some handicap social, economic, physical
or mental are unable to avail of or are traditionally denied the amenities and services provided by the community. In the beginning, emphasis was on the provision of institutional services but it has now been shifted to the preventive and developmental aspects.

The health problem of women in society at large is another crucial area not given the required attention. Due to the predominantly patriarchal order, women are confined within an oppressive environment. Differences are frequently noted between health and nutritional status of men and women.

Nutritional surveys have been indicated high rates of inadequacies among females compared to males. Female infants and children are subject to neglect in respect of nutrition and health care. Statistics from primary health centres show that adult men do not generally take treatment for them. A number of studies have indicated that a large number of children suffer from malnutrition to which the mother's poor health contributes to a great extent. Anaemia among rural women is estimated to be as high as 60-80 per cent leading to low birth weight among babies.

There has been a steady decline in sex ratio. For 1000 men, there were 972 women in 1901 which became 946 in 1951 and 930 in 1971 and 933 in 1981. Sex ratio for all ages in 1951 was 951 for rural areas and 878 for urban areas. The
inter-State variations are considerable. The ratio is adverse in the States of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal. It is most favourable in Kerala followed by Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, the expectation of life at birth is also a good indicator for development which shows that it is 50 years for females and 51 for males in 1981.

The information available from the Sample Registration System, Registrar General of India reveals that the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is more among female babies as compared to males in rural and urban areas as indicated in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>All India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In literacy also, excluding 0-4 years age group, the number of women literates is less than half of the males (i.e., 24.82 per cent for women against 46.89 per cent for males). The rural female literacy rate is only 20.65 per cent, unlike the urban rate 54.41 per cent. About 85 districts have less
than 5 per cent female literacy and 115 between 5 and 10 per cent. The female literacy rate for scheduled caste is 8.50 per cent and for scheduled tribe is 6.35 per cent.

The female literacy rate has consistently been lower in rural as well as urban sectors. In rural areas, where 77 per cent of the female population lives, women's literacy rate is only 17.96 per cent. The urban literacy rate for females is 47.82 per cent. The literacy rate for females varies from 65.73 per cent in Kerala to only 11.42 per cent in Rajasthan.

**WOMEN IN UNORGANISED SECTOR**

Scanty attention is paid on women's participation both in organised and unorganised sectors and its implications in formulating women job policy is yet a 'thrust area' in economic research, comparatively the work in unorganised sector is yet a dry area and hence require intensive work. This is so necessary in countries like India to assess the quality of life of people and also the developmental stature of the country. It is so because India is bearing largely illiterates with reference to women and the tradition does have considerable influence on women work participation.

The largest number of studies are on employment, labour force participation in industries and career recommendations for the future generations, specially regarding white collar
jobs for urban women. Apart from a few studies on agriculture, research on women in the unorganised sector of the economy is conspicuous by its absence. The crying need for research in this sector, where the majority of women are employed, has been emphasised in the 'Report of the Committee on the Status of Women'.

The National Commission on Labour, specifying its difficulties in identifying unorganised labour by any exact definition, took recourse to describing some of their characteristics and constraints, namely, (a) casual nature of employment, (b) ignorance and illiteracy, (c) small size of establishments and (d) superior strength of the employers operating singly and in combination.  

The gradual commercialization and modernization of the economy and the efforts made by Government to replace traditional by modern institutions of credit and marketing, to stabilise ownership of land, and to maintain minimum wages, have by no means succeed in organising the production relations to control the degree of exploitation of the weaker sections, nor have these solved the problems of low productivity, poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Traditional mode of production relations which defy modern classification into employers and employees, 20 labour and

capital, rent and interest still prevail in most industries in this section. The impact of this inter-mixture has been greater on women in unorganised sector.

Agricultural sector is the major economic activity of women in unorganised sector. 86.73 per cent of women workers are found in rural areas and 28.65 per cent in urban areas. Wage discrimination is the common feature in agricultural sector. Though the minimum wages act was passed to reduce discrimination in wages of workers, it has little effect over the actual wage disbursment.

The disabilities of women workers spring from the nature of immobility of job caused by various socio-economic factors. The disappearance of cottage industries has thrown heavy burden on agriculture. The main disabilities and source of exploitation of agricultural workers are rooted in their landlessness, lack of organisation and inequality of status. The conditions of women in agricultural sector remained the same over a long period of time without much change in their life styles.

Largest number of women are employed in non-agricultural occupations both in rural and urban areas. The construction industry, cotton works, traditional professions, food process-

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ing, tailoring and readymade garments, sweepers and scavengers, domestic servants, petty traders, casual/daily wage earners, self-employment, weaving, retail trade, etc., come in order of preference next only to agricultural occupation.

It is due to heavy competition with factory sector, there has been a decline of this group of industries. The most important features of this sector is that most of the women labourers are appointed as contract labourers.

Studies conducted in several parts of the country indicate the 'awful conditions' of the women workers in this sector. It is observed that a significant percentage of these jobs are 'manned' by women drawn from lower caste and class. Ignorance, traditional bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skills, seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payment, discrimination in wage structures of men and women, lack of guarantee of minimum wage, lack of job security, lack of a comprehensive legislation to cover these workers in unorganised sector, competition in employment and the resultant deprival of real wage, lack of minimum facilities at the work place, ill-treatment, migration and disintegration of families, bondage and alienation, etc., are some of the characteristics of the employment of women in this sector. Although these jobs offer no attraction and require a great
deal of physical ordeal, large number of women continue to search for these jobs for their livelihood over the years only to taste disrespect, slavery and ill-health.23

Women engaged in self-employment occupations or as wage labourers in informal sector are varied in nature. These women are found in retail trade of various products ranging from natural produce to processed products, or undertaking self-employment in textiles, hosiery, garments, woollen dresses, tailoring, food processing, coir, poultry, fishing, etc. The nature and character of employment although manual to some extent, also require certain special skills for efficient management.

Low-caste-low-class dimension, involvement of family members in the work, illiteracy, acquisition of skills through experience, long hours of work with no stipulated timings, requirement of petty capital investment, problem of space, displacement and movements concerning the business operation, harassment and exploitation by police, municipal officials, monopolistic traders, intermediary traders, anti-social elements and money lenders, lack of credit facilities, refusal of official credit agencies to provide funds, dearth and non-availability of raw material, problem of storage, problems of transport and marketing of products.

etc., characterise the urban informal sector. Several studies pointed out the declining volume of incomes and disposal trade prospects. The government programmes and schemes of women finance corporation, vocational guidance centres and Khadi Gramodyog Commission have done little to protect these women to stabilise their economic status.

Though it is difficult to assess unemployment and under-employment, still many women became its victims. The higher level of unemployment and underemployment among women leads to conclude that their proportions below the poverty line is likely to be higher than men. The inter-related problems of poverty, unemployment and under-employment affect the economy as a whole.

Women who are drawn from rural areas are unskilled labourers, poverty is the basic reason for them to enter such jobs which entail hard labour and reward very little. Researches conducted on the consumption levels prove that a majority of the people are living below the subsistence level.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES FOR WOMEN

The Government of India has made the following official attempts to improve the status of women. In 1971, the Government appointed the committee on the status of women. The committee first compiled the comprehensive report on the

status of women and presented a picture of a grim story of inequality. A national plan of action was formulated along with a machinery which included the National Committee on Women, the Steering Committee of the National Committee and the Women's Development Bureau. It is instructive that some of these committees have not met even once. Expectedly their achievements remain obscure.

Apart from the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, the Ministry of Labour, other ministries also have programmes which may include women viz., the Khadi and Village Industries Commission have programmes in which participation of women is nearly 45 per cent according to Government Reports. In the Ministry of Labour and Department of Rural Development, there are new special cells for women's development. The Directorate of Employment and Training has set up some vocational training institutes for women. There are two government run women's development corporations that assist in loans, marketing, training and employment, but these exist only in two States. Government programmes for women also included in the IRDP schemes, Integrated Child Development Programmes, Maternal and Child Welfare Schemes, etc. In 1982, the development of women and children in rural areas was initiated. Though these have been well intentioned efforts, their impact on
women have so far not been particularly noticeable.

In the employment generation schemes, women form a substantial proportion (57 per cent) of applicants. Yet most schemes do not take any note of the special needs of women either in conception, design, implementation or the hiring of the personnel.

Planning as now conceived and practical benefits women only incidently and residentially rather than as equal claimants with men. The Sixth Plan for the first time had a special chapter on women, but the schemes outlined were selective and half-hearted. The Seventh Plan by stressing attitudinal change as a precondition for women's development and emphasising the need to promote voluntary effort, has even abdicated that responsibility.

The report brought out by the Ministry of Social Welfare at the end of the International Women's Decade declared:

"The issue now in the Indian context is one of methodology, the integration of women into development by a participatory delivery of programmes on the one side and the strengthening of women's organisations, articulation and their capacity to absorb development inputs and become part of the process of women's development". Now the burden is on women to become capable of absorbing development inputs. But who designs those inputs?
The literature on women and development from Asia, Africa and Latin America by and large emphasises the male bias on planned development and the neglect of women in policy making. However, posing the question in this manner limits the problems to that of inadequate implementation. We must realise that women's development concerns go far beyond filling in gaps. They relate to fundamental issues like the nature of the development model, its current computations and their historical antecedents in power relations at various levels. Therefore, it is not enough to ask how has development affected women, but rather, we must also ask what does development mean for women? What is the connection of women to the theories and models of development?

A theory cannot be worked out to put an add to the discrimination of women and inferiority feeling among people in a developing country like India. First women must be free to think.

**NEED FOR INTEGRATING WOMEN TO DEVELOPMENT**

The broad survey of the position and role of women in the advanced countries and India points to the need for integrating women to the development process as equal partners with men. Several activists, organisations have sprung up all over the world to work for the cause of women. It is increasingly, being released that lack of effective linkage
between local and national levels, or between specific programmes and macro-policies usually prevents the achievement of women's integration in development. Women must be integrated into the development process not only symbolically, but in the most central process of resource allocation in development planning.25

Hence, the first issue is to spell out ways in which women can be integrated in the development process and to see what kind of resources need to be allocated to them. This would also open up the major question namely, what type of development do we need? Should development policies continue to maintain the dichotomy between the modern and traditional sectors?

The second issue which is vital from women's perspective is the question of technology. How technology is introduced who owns it and who controls its use are fundamental questions that must be the basis for planning.26 The test of technology would have to be posed in the context of the food, fuel, water crisis, experienced in particular by the world's poor. The role of women in the food chain activities, namely, production, processing, preservation and preparation of food is extremely

important. Lack of women's access to land, credit and education prevents the access to and control of new technologies. In the sphere of production, cash crops have competed for land and labour with food crops. The new technology has further drawn and labour off from food crops because it is focussed on cash crops. So those who depended on the production of food crops have to migrate for the sake of cash income to urban areas, women have to work in cash crop forms in addition to their work in the food crop land. Most of the studies show that the new technology for cash may have increased cash income but it has led to fall in the nutritional levels. With regard to processing, for example, it is seen that small rice mills using rubbers, rollers add to national income nine times the value of the lost jobs.  

Traditional methods of food preservation have to be scientifically studied and then appropriate changes introduced. Similarly in preparation of food, availability of water and fuel should be ensured. Most of the time of women in rural areas is spent in fetching water, collecting fuel. These activities should be given top priority when any choice of technology is contemplated.

Thirdly, the position of women in the informal sector should occupy our attention. Their living conditions need to be studied in greater detail.

27. Ibid.
Finally, the question of industrialisation itself needs to be reopened. Industrialisation has taken resources out of the household and as a consequence women have forced to work at the lower paid jobs in the market sectors to maintain life. Industrialisation has given women some fairly elaborate domestic technology in return. This technology however is not for the poor. Women's work in the domestic sphere continues to be outside the G.N.P. calculations. If development simply means convention of all non-market activities into market activities then sooner or later this myth would be explored. Women would be the first ones to see through the game provided they are given a chance.

CONCLUSION

The economic status of women in any society is really an important indicator of its economic development. Women in the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) of South-East Asia participate more actively in economic development than their counterparts in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The major characteristic feature of women in developing countries is their predominant role in agriculture. Women's work and worth in LDC's is invisible and severely devalued. The economic development has not been an unmixed blessing for

women in the developing countries rather and it has worsened their lot.

On the eve of the International Women's Decade 1975-85, a Committee was set up in India to enquire into the status of women. One fact which came to light was that the FWPR has been falling in India since 1901. The Committee also brought out the degree of wage discrimination between males and females both in agriculture and industry.

The demographic features of female population like excessive mortality on female children resulting in persistent decline in the sex ratio, low rate of literacy and low economic status stress the need for greater attention to the economic emancipation of women. Under different five year plans special programmes taken up for the welfare of women and also to cater to their special requirements. Nutritional surveys have been indicated high rates of inadequacies among females compared to males.

In the analysis of historical development of women's role in the Indian society, women enjoyed a higher status in ancient India compared to contemporary Greek and Roman civilizations. But after the Vedic period, the status of women was started to decline. It started to change for the better very slowly with the advent of the British Education System but women are still victims of the basically exploitative system
operating against them.

Women play a vital role in socio-economic development of our country. Their contribution to agricultural development is greater than to the development of other sectors. In the fast changing scenario and emerging conditions they are expected to play more prominent role in the years to come.

Agricultural sector is the major economic activity of women in unorganised sector. Largest number of women are employed in non-agricultural occupations both in rural and urban areas. The construction industry, bidi industry, match industry, cotton works, traditional professions, food processing, tailoring and readymade garments, sweepers and scavengers, domestic servants, petty traders, casual/daily wage earners, self-employment, weaving, retail trade, etc., come in order of preference next only to agricultural occupation. Although these jobs offer no attraction and require a great deal of physical ordeal, large number of women continue to search for these jobs for their livelihood. The government programmes and schemes of women finance corporation, vocational guidance centres or Khadi Gramodyog Commission have done little to protect these women to stabilise their economic status.

The Government of India has made some official attempts
to improve the status of women. In 1971, it appointed a committee on the status of women. Apart from, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, the Ministry of Labour, other ministries also have programmes which may include women. Government programmes for women also included in the IRDP schemes, Integrated Child Development Programmes, Maternal and Child Welfare Schemes, etc. Though there have been well intentioned efforts, their impact on women have so far not been particularly noticeable.

There is a need for integrating women to the development process as equal partners with men. Women must be integrated into the development process not only symbolically, but in the most central process of resource allocation in development planning.