

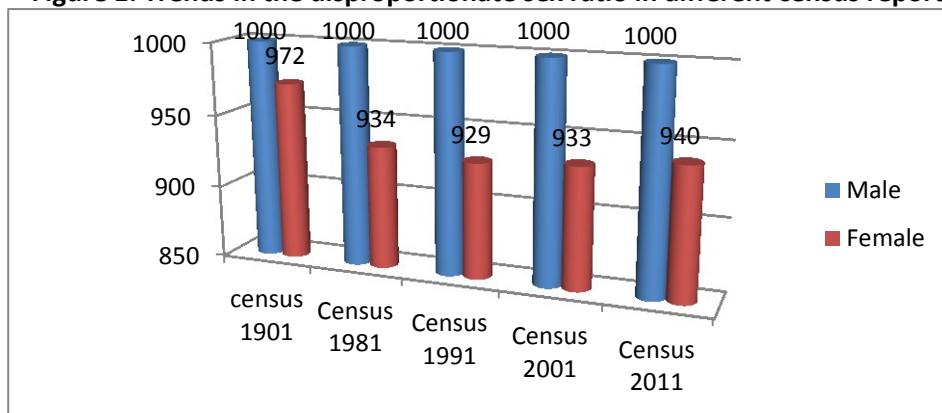
# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: MILES TO GO

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## INTRODUCTION

Women and men are just like two wheels of a chariot. Women and men are equal in importance. There is a saying in English that **“the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”**. The meaning is that the mother exercises a very great influence over the lives of her children. They mould their thoughts and character. But the position and status of women in India is low despite the myth of they are being considered a “goddess” and “shakti” personified (Murarka, 2013). As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. They have no individuality. They are to be protected by their father in their youth, by their husband after marriage and then by their sons. These ideas persist with little dilution to this day and have caused immense harm to the status of women. Women constitute almost 50% of the world population. But India has shown disproportionate sex ratio (It refers to the number of female per thousand of males) whereby female population has been comparatively lower than male (Figure-1).

**Figure 1: Trends in the disproportionate sex ratio in different census reports.**



Source: census reports of India.

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**Table 1: The sex ratio of some selected countries in 2011**

WORLD AVERAGE	984
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	1167
JAPAN	1055
BRAZIL	1042
U.S.A	1025
INDONESIA	988
NIGERIA	987
INDIA	940
CHINA	926

Source: census of India.2011.

It can be seen from the above Table-1, that the sex ratio of India (940) is way below the world average i.e. 984 and is lower than the sex ratio of the developed countries.

## **EMPOWERMENT**

Women's empowerment is very essential for development of the society. The phrase "women's empowerment" is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-developed by providing them access to all the freedom and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being 'women'. In the specific sense, women's empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society (Bhuyan, 2006). Women's empowerment is conceptualized as a function of women's access to and control over resources, which extend to their decision making capabilities regarding household decisions, employment, income, household assets and expenditure, fertility, sexuality, and the freedom of movement (physical mobility) and their control over material and intangible resources such as property information and time; their position within the household vis-à-vis other male and female household members (Dyson and Moor, 1983; Batliwala and Anitha,1998).

## **NEED FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:**

Indian women community is one of the greatest women communities. So it is very difficult to achieve social, political, economical and other development of the nation without development of women. The developed countries such as the U.S.A., the U.K. Canada, and Australia achieved their development because of their gender equality. Generally in such countries women are educated, employed and they also lead the society. But In India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of society whether it is social participation, economic participation and access to education or reproductive health care (Dhruba, 2011). It is only through women's

empowerment that India can overtake its challenges and march ahead on the path of development.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL MEASURES**

After independence of India, the Constitution makers and the national leaders recognized the equal social position of women with men. These can be found in different articles of the constitution which are as follows:

Article 14: Provides that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law and equal protection of law within the territory of India.

Article 15: Declares that government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex, religion, race, cast or place of birth and article 15 (3): Makes a special provision enabling the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

Article 16: Provides for equal opportunity in matters relating to public employment and article 16 (4): Empower the state to make the special provision for women and children.

#### **These provisions are justifiable.**

Article 39 (a): Equal right and adequate means of livelihood and Article 39 (c): Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 42: Directs the state to make the provision for ensuring just and human conditions of work and maternity relief (Sen, K.M. & A.K.S.Kumar, 2006).

Above all 42<sup>nd</sup> constitutional amendment part IV (A) Article 51(A) imposes a fundamental duty to renounce derogatory to the dignity of the women.<sup>8</sup> Article 325 and 326 of the constitution of India guarantee political equality-equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively. While letter has been accessed, exercised and enjoyed by a large number of women, the former i.e., right to equal political participation is still a distance dream.

### **LEGISLATIVE MEASURES**

Indian legislation has played a notable role in bringing about improvement in the role and status of women. The severe disabilities from which Indian women suffered at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been rectified gradually through laws and successive amendments. Lord Bentinck at the instance of Rammohan Roy abolished Sati through a regulation in 1829. The widow Re-Marriage Act of 1856, the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, The Marriage Women Property Act, 1874 and Age of Consent

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<sup>8</sup> <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>, accessed on 21 June, 2014.

Act of 1881 led to a gradual emancipation of women in India. The Child Marriage Restraint (Sarada) Act 1929, meant for the restraint of the solemnization of child marriage, has recently been amended to raise the marriageable age for boys and girls to 21 and 18 respectively (Murarka, 2013).. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 permits inter cast and inter religious marriages. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 is a major social legislation covering all aspects of Hindu marriage, including abolition of bigamy and provision of divorce for women. Hindu Succession Act, 1956 confers property on women. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 enhances the status of women in the matter of adoption. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 is an act to abolish the giving and taking of dowry at the time of marriage. The Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (1956-57) is meant to reduce the scope of prostitution and to reform them. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, enacted to implement Art.39 (d) of the Constitution of India, states that the employer is obliged to pay equal remuneration to men and women workers for same work or work of a similar nature and similar condition of employment. In 2005, the Government of India enacted the Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, to provide more effective protection of the rights of women from violence of any kind occurring within the family. Recently the government has enacted the Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (prevention, prohibition and redress of incidents of sexual harassment) Act, 2013, to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at work place and for the prevention and redress of complaint of sexual harassment (Abraham *et al.*, 2014).

## OTHER MEASURES

Apart from these, the government of India has been trying to empower the women through various schemes. Some schemes are, Swawalamban Yojana (1982-83), previously known as NOARD<sup>9</sup>, women's economic programme, the support to Training for Employment programme (STEP-1987), Mahila Samridhi Yojana (1993), the Rashtraya Mahila Kosh(RMK/1993), Indira Mahila Yojana (1995)<sup>10</sup>, Integrated Rural Development programme(IRDP/1980), aims at providing self-employment to the rural poor. DWACRA<sup>11</sup> Plan(1982-83) and Balika Samridhi Yojana (1997), Swa-Shakti scheme(1999), Swayamsidha Scheme(2001), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (2009, 22

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<sup>9</sup> Noard Stands for Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation, is a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its task is to ensure effective foreign aid.

<sup>10</sup> "Schemes for Economic Empowerment of Poor Women". Government of India Press Information Bureau. 6 March 2013. Accessed on 21 June 2014.

<sup>11</sup> DWACRA-stands for Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, a sub scheme of IRDA, to improve socio-economic, health and educational status of rural women by providing financial assistant.



May), Priyadarshini Scheme (2011) and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls-Sabala (2012)<sup>12</sup> etc.

Besides these, the Planning Commission of India has fixed certain targets to empower women. The first four five years plans were focused on organizing various welfare activities for women with priority to women's education. The fifth and sixth plans witnessed a shift in approach from welfare to overall development of women in India. The seventh plan laid stress on efforts to identify and promote beneficiary oriented programme with the intention of extending direct benefit to women in India. The eighth plan made a significant shift from development to women's empowerment. The ninth plan ensured that a minimum of 30% of benefits or funds should be allocated to women from all ministries and departments of the government. The tenth plan emphasized on the empowerment of women through the help of National Policy and in eleventh plan women were recognized for the first time women as an agent of socio-economic development. It gives importance to active participation of women in their own development and adopts a participatory approach<sup>13</sup>.

The government of India conducts many programmes for the purpose of empowering women. But there still exists a wide gulf between the goals and the situational reality. The Indian government is still facing many barriers and obstacles to establish women's empowerment throughout the country.

### CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

One of the most important challenges today is the question of violence and crimes committed against women. There are various forms of crime against women. It includes rape, sexual assault, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for dowry, torture, eve-teasing, immoral traffic and indecent representation of women. According to the 2005 report of the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) of the Central Home Ministry, in India, the following is the average statistical record of on the frequency of crime committed against women:

- (a) Crime committed against women occurs every 3 minutes.
- (b) Molestation case occurs every 15 minutes.
- (c) Rape case occurs every 29 minutes.
- (d) Sexual harassment case occurs every 53 minutes.
- (e) Case of cruelty by husband and relatives occurs every 9 minutes.
- (f) Dowry death case occurs every 77 minutes.
- (g) Kidnapping and abduction case occurs every 23 minutes (NCRB report, 2005).

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<sup>12</sup> Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=welfare schemes for women in India &01did=626342391](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=welfare%20schemes%20for%20women%20in%20India&01did=626342391)

<sup>13</sup> Available at <http://www.planningcommission.govt.ac>. Accessed on 20/10/10, Govt. of India.

The following statistics (Table No-2) provided by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows an alarming increase in the number of crimes against women:

**Table 2: Focuses attention on crime head-wise incident of crime against women during 2009-2013 and % variation in 2013 over 2012.**

Sl.	CRIME HEAD	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage variation in 2013 over 2012
01	Rape	21,397	22,172	24,205	24,923	33,707	35.2
02	Kidnapping & Abduction	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	51,881	35.6
03	Dowry death	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	8,083	-1.8
04	Cruelty by husband or his relatives	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	1,18,866	11.6
05	Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty.	8,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	70,739	56.0
06	Insult to modesty of woman	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	12,589	7.2
07	Importation of girls from foreign country	48	36	80	59	31	-47.4
08	Immoral traffic (prevention act) 1956	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	2,579	0.6
09	Incident representation of women (p) act, 1986	8,45	8,95	4,53	1,41	3,62	156.7
10	The dowry prohibition act, 1961	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	10,709	17.9
Total		203804	213585	228649	244270	309546	26.7

Source: Crime in India, 2014. National Crime Record Bureau. (Table-5(A)).

As per the above data, crimes against women in India clearly show a sharp increase. This is a matter of grave concern as it points towards the endangered status of India's women and their lack of safety and security.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's political participation has been considered a major index of women's empowerment. By end-January 2012, women accounted for 19.7% of parliamentarians worldwide. This amounts to nearly a 75% increase since 1995. While the trend points to an increase in women's participation in legislation, the role of representation in India remains low overall (MDG report 2012)<sup>14</sup>. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Indian constitution have impacted over nearly 600 million Indian people in 5,00,000 villages. There are 27, 82,293 elected representatives in Panchayats out of which women constitute 37.5% (Yojana, 2012). The Indian government has raised women's representations in all tiers of Panchayati Raj system from 33% to at least 50%. The Union cabinet cleared a proposal to amend article

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202012.pdf>

243(d) of the constitution for this purpose on August, 27, 2009<sup>15</sup>. The women Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve 33% of all seats in the lower house of parliament of India and state Assemblies for women, has brought a ray of hope in the minds of Indian women folk. This bill seeks to reserve for women 181 out of the 543 seats in Lok Sabha and 1370 seats out of a total 4109 seats in the 28 state assemblies (Deka, 2013). This bill was finally passed in April, 2010 by the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the parliament). It is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Parliament). The successful passing of this bill would overcome inhibitions which are centuries old among women and encourage them to gradually shoulder responsibilities in the legislative Assemblies and in Parliament. Yet percentage of women in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and in Council of Ministers is found between 7% and 12% even after 67 years of Independence. Tables-3 and 4, and Figure-2 present the total number of females and their percentage in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and Council of Ministers (India), respectively.

**Table 3: Trends in the position of women in Lok Sabha, 1952-14, India.**

Lok sabha	Year	Total no seats	Members		Percentage of female to total
			Male	Female	
I	1952	499	477	22	4.41
II	1957	500	473	27	5.40
III	1962	503	469	34	6.76
IV	1967	523	492	31	5.93
V	1971	521	499	22	4.22
VI	1977	544	525	19	3.49
VII	1980	544	516	28	5.1
VIII	1984	544	500	44	8.09
IX	1089	517	490	27	5.22
XI	1996	543	504	39	7.18
XII	1998	543	500	43	7.92
XIII	1999	543	494	49	9.02
XIV	2004	543	499	44	8.10
XV	2009	543	484	59	10.86
XVI	2014	543	482	61	11.24

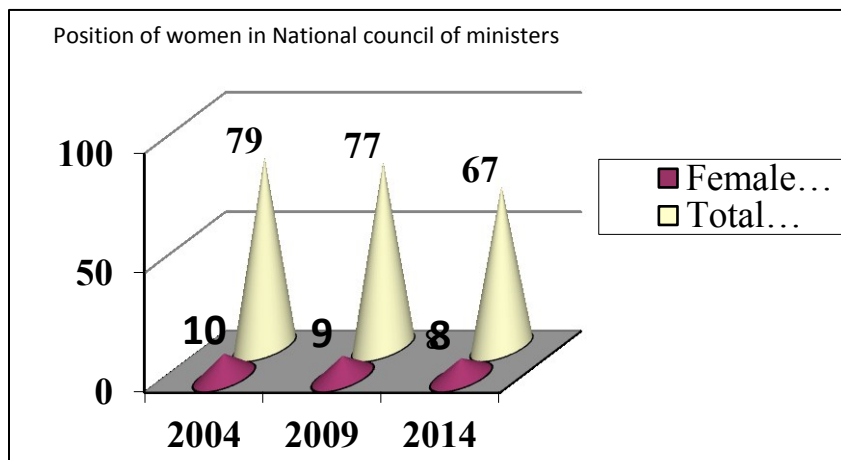
Source: Lok Sabha members, Loksabha secretariat, New Delhi.

<sup>15</sup> . <http://nmew.gov.in/index1.ph?Lang=1&Level=1&sublinked=264&Lid=250&1typeid=3&domia=10> (Accessed on 20 Jan.,2013).

**Table 4: Trends in the Position of women in Rajya Sabha in various periods, India**

Year	Total seats	Members		Percentage of female members.
		Male	Female	
2006	242	218	24	9.92
2007	250	225	25	10
2009	243	213	21	8.97
2011	241	215	26	10.78
2013	243	216	27	12.50
2014	243	214	29	11.93

Source: Rajya Sabha Secretariat

**Figure 2: The position of women in national council of ministers (India).**

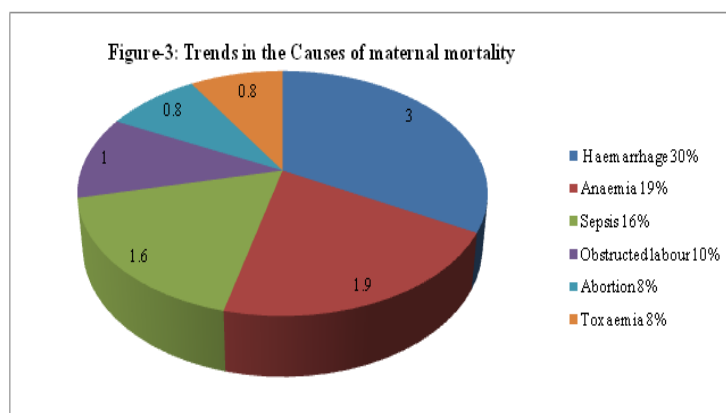
Source: www.parliament of India.com

It is very clear from the above statistics (Table-3& 4) and chart (Figure-2) that the percentage of women in legislature and decision making position always remains low.

### HEALTH PROBLEM

Another factor that is hindering the success of women's empowerment is the deteriorated condition of the health of women. A women's health affects the household economic wellbeing, as a women in poor health will be less productive in the labour force .Although the expectation of life at birth of women has increased from 36.1 years in 1951 to 66.91 years in 2001-06 (IIPS, 2006), the health and nutritional status of women and girls leaves much scope for improvement. Poor nutrition among women begins in the infancy and continues through their lifetime. The dietary intake of women in low economic group was deficient by 500 to 600 calories (IIPS, 2006). The National Family Health Survey-2 estimates that 35.8% of

women in the country suffer from chronic emergency deficiency, with a body mass index (BM) of less than 18.5kg/m<sup>2</sup> (IIPS & ORC Macro, 2000). In many parts of India, especially rural India, women are the ones who eat last and least in the whole family. This means they eat whatever is left after the men folk are satisfied. As a result most of the times their food intake does not contain the nutritional value required in maintaining a healthy body. Maternal mal-nutrition has been associated with an increased risk of maternal mortality. The maternal mortality in India is the 56<sup>th</sup> highest in the world. In its 2009 report UNICEF came up with shocking figures on the



Source: UNICEF Report (2009). The Coverage Evolution Survey 2009

status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of child birth complications in that year and according to the above mentioned UNICEF reports the causes of maternal mortality (UNICEF REPORT, 2009) is shown in Figure 3.

Many of the health problems of Indian women are exacerbated by high levels of fertility. As women are not given proper attention, which results in mal-nutrition and they are married at an early age which leads to pregnancies at younger age when body is not ready to bear the burden of a child. The average Indian woman bears her first child before she is 22 years old. In rural India, almost 60% of girls are married before they are 18. Nearly 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19 (IIPS, 2006). High levels of infant mortality combined with the strong son preference motivate women to bear high number of children in an attempt to have a son or to survive to adulthood. The numerous pregnancies and closely spaced births erode a mother's nutritional status, which can negatively affect the pregnancy outcome (that is pre-mature births, low birth weight babies) and also increase the health risk of the mother. Anemia is another factor related to maternal health and mortality. Severe anemia accounts for 20% of all maternal deaths in India (Chatterjee, 1990). A study in 2000 found that nearly 70% of non-pregnant women and 75% of pregnant women

were anemic in terms of iron-deficiency (Alessandro, 2013). Actually discrimination against girl children start in the womb and untold number of female fetus is aborted in prenatal sex-selection stage. This is in spite of legislation prevalent in many parts of India. In fact the leading contributor to high maternal mortality ratio in India is lack of access to health care. Only 42% births in the country are supervised in medical institutions. In rural areas most of the women deliver with the help of women in the family, contradictory to the fact that the unprofessional or unskilled deliverer lacks the knowledge about pregnancy (Sen, 2006). Of all health workers in the country, nearly two-third is men. This specially affects rural areas where it has been found that out of all doctors only 6% are women (Rao, and Rao, 2013). There is a strong co-relation between illiteracy and women's health. It has been found that children of illiterate mothers are twice under nourished as compared to the children of literate mothers (Saha and Saha, 2010).

## EDUCATION

Another great challenge faced by the Indian women in society is the low literacy rate among women. Education significantly makes a difference in the lives of women. It leads to direct economic benefits in the form of higher life time earnings for women. The society and community also benefit from the higher productivity of its labor force. After Independence, the government of India takes measures to provide education to all women of the country. Some of the schemes in this direction are the following:

a) Mahila Samakhyas Programme, was launched in (1988) as a result of the New Education Policy (1968) for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups (NPE-1986, revised in 1992)<sup>16</sup>.

b) To implement the provision of Art.45 of the Indian constitution the government enacted a law in 2002 by 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment. According to this law elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)<sup>17</sup>.

c) Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV), July 2004, to provide education to girls at the primary level for underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level of females is very low (MHRD Annual report 2011<sup>18</sup>, d) National Programme for

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<sup>16</sup> [http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE86-mod92.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE86-mod92.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Accessed online: <http://www.‘‘Sarva shiksha Abhiyan:Girls education Schemes’’.ac.in>

<sup>18</sup> [http://164.100.47.134/intranet/Minority\\_Education.pdf](http://164.100.47.134/intranet/Minority_Education.pdf)

Education of Girls at Elementary level (NPEGEL), July, 2013, was an incentive to reach out to the girls whom the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes (NPEGEL: Brief)<sup>19</sup>.

There has been a large increase in the proportion of women who are literate. Despite the improvements in literacy there continues to be a large gap between the literacy levels of men and of women (Table-5). Fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school and many girls drop out.

**Table 5: Trends in the literacy rate in India, 1951-2011.**

Year	Persons (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Gap in literacy rate (%)
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India, 2011

As per above Table 5, the female literacy rate has progressively increased. But it is still below the desired level. Comparing to male literacy it is clear that female literacy is neglected. There are several reasons for the low levels of literacy in India. Those reasons are-a) lack of proper school facilities; b) lack of qualified schoolteachers; c) inadequate transport facilities; d) fear of sexual harassment; e) unhygienic toilets and even no toilet facilities; f) fixed schooling hour; g) lack of hostel facilities; h) uneducated parents and i) presence of ignorance (Nagi, 2013).

## **ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

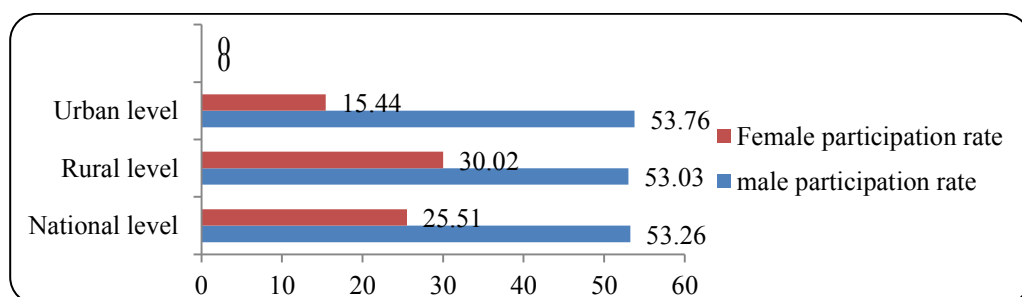
Women form an integral part of the Indian work force. But their participation rate in the work place is also very low. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), out of 131 countries for which data was available, India ranked 11<sup>th</sup> from the bottom in female labour force participation (FLFP) (Nagarajan, 2013)<sup>20</sup>. According to the estimates of 2011 census, the number of total female workers is 149.8 million and female workers in rural areas and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.indg.in/primary-education/women-and-education/5\\_npegel-brief.pdf](http://www.indg.in/primary-education/women-and-education/5_npegel-brief.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toireporter/author-Rema-Nagarajan-68293,filterby-2.cms>

respectively. Out of total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural laborers of the remaining females workers, 8.5 million are in household industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers (Census Reports, 2011).

**Figure- 4 focuses on male and female work-participation rate in different levels.**



Source: Census report, 2011.

Women work longer hours than men and carry the major share of house-hold and community work that is unpaid and invisible. Women earn 62% of men's salary for equal work (Chatterjee, 2013)). In so far as organized sector is concerned, in March 2011, women workers constituted 20.5% of total employment in organized sector in the country which is higher by 0.1% as compared to the preceding year (Census Reports, 2011)<sup>21</sup>. Women are mostly to be found in the unorganized sector, marked by poor quality of work and absence of social protection of any kind. In central government jobs, women accounted for 7.6% in 1991, which almost two decades later had touched just 10 percent (Nagarajan, 2013) (Figure-4).

India has enacted many laws and launched many development schemes especially for empowerment of women. Some measures have started giving positive outcomes relating to women's problems. We are now witnessing a steady improvement in the enrolment of women in the education institutions and even professional institutes. In this decade they are entering the job market in increasing numbers. They are showing their skills even in non-traditional sectors like police, defense, administration, media and research fields (Murgai and Bagade, 2013). But the position of women in our country still leaves much to be desired. The problems of

<sup>21</sup> [http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data\\_files/meghalaya/Graphs.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/meghalaya/Graphs.pdf)



women are not going to change overnight but because of that we cannot stop taking action.

The gross problems which are hindering the progress of women empowerment are lack of awareness, lack of social and economic empowerment, lack of political will, lack of enforcement by the police force and last but not least is a lack of gender culture. The removal of all these problems requires a mass consciousness. However, the status of women can only be improved by the women themselves and nobody else. Women need to empower themselves through education, legal literacy, employment opportunities and right to inheritance. Achieving change requires collaborative efforts. The community's male members' cooperation is required for resisting discrimination against women. Steps such as universalizing existing development programmes to include women, skilling women through training and workshops, creating legal awareness through producing book, pamphlets and media campaign should be undertaken to facilitate women's empowerment. At the end we can quote Vivekananda who said, "There is no change for the welfare of the world unless the condition of Women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

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