

Can Women Promote India's Economic Development?

Across the globe, educating and empowering women has proven to be the catalyst for rapid economic growth. Conversely, societies where women are repressed are among the most backward.

Denying women opportunities to realize their potential is a waste of human capital and bar to economic progress.

Women are undoubtedly the foundation of the basic unit of society - the family. Even in additional roles they demonstrate great innovation, skill, intelligence, hard work and commitment.

If we can harness these attributes effectively, India's growth can be more inclusive and equitable. The education of women is therefore the key to the development process.

When we educate and empower one woman, we set off a chain reaction that transforms the life of her family and the community she lives in.

An exemplary model is the network of trained Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), trained under the National Rural Health Mission, who has played a crucial role in improving the health of women and children across India.

In India, social evils and a rising rape rate are confronting women in urban and rural areas, regardless of which political party is at the helm. Women are not being given a chance to become stronger in the political sector.

Legal and Constitutional Safeguards against Gender Inequality

The Indian Constitution provides for positive efforts to eliminate gender inequality; the Preamble to the Constitution talks about goals of achieving social, economic and political justice to everyone and provide equality of status and of opportunity to all its citizens. Further, women have equal right to participate in our political system. Article 15 of the Constitution provides for prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex also apart from other grounds such as religion, race, caste or place of birth. Article 15(3) authorizes the State to make any special provision for women and children. Moreover, the Directive Principles of State Policy also provides various provisions, which are for the benefit of women, and provides safeguards against discrimination.

Other than these Constitutional safeguards, various protective Legislations have also been enacted by the Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in society. For instance,

The Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati;

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to eliminate the practice of dowry;

The Special Marriage Act, 1954 to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion;

Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill (introduced in Parliament in 1991, passed in 1994 to stop female infanticide and many more such Acts.

Furthermore, the Parliament time to time brings out amendments to existing laws in order to give protection to women according to the changing needs of the society, for instance, Section 304-B was added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to make dowry-death or bride-burning a specific offence punishable with maximum punishment of life imprisonment.