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## ROLE OF COLLECTIVE AGENCY IN GENDER RIGHTS

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**This eSSay on Women Rights and Advocacy by Vibhuti Patel is part of a series on Maharashtra focusing on major development issues in the state. We are grateful to the author for taking the time and effort to prepare and write the essay for eSS.**

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# Role of Collective Agency in Gender Rights

*The fact that progress in equal rights for women has come about largely through the efforts of social reform movement in the 19th century and women's liberation movement in the 20th century Maharashtra highlights the essential role of collective agency in human progress. Given the constraints on women's agency by political institutions such as male-dominated political parties, social institutions such as the family, and social norms such as women's responsibilities for care work, these issues and their underlying causes clearly must be tackled head on.*

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## **Introduction**

Publication, dissemination and discussion on Human Development Report (HDR), Maharashtra 2002 has resulted in greater sensitivity among government sector on gender concerns. It was revealed by the HDR that in 2002, Maharashtra ranked the 4<sup>th</sup> in Human Development Index. This background paper of the Human Development Report of Maharashtra aims to do the same within the framework of right based perspective. The economic activity rate of women, 35.97 percent for Maharashtra was higher than the national average of 29 percent. The state has the highest level of industrialization with the highest work participation women in the industrial and service sector.

Maharashtra has an outstanding record of establishing Women Development Corporation, way back in 1975. The state has 12 all women panchayats. In 2011, the Maharashtra Assembly unanimously approved 50 per cent reservation for women in local bodies-Village Councils (Panchayat Samitis), District Councils (Zilla Parishads), municipal councils and municipal corporations in the State. (Mahila Rajsatta Andolan, 2011). As compared to many Indian states visibility of women in statistics, indicators, corridors of economic power structures and decision-making bodies is higher in Maharashtra. Women achieves of all sections of society are publicly felicitated by the government on every 3rd January (Savitribai Phule's birthday) and 8<sup>th</sup> March 1 (International women's Day). Media coverage on women's issues in both English and regional languages has improved a lot in last decade. Women Development Cells with twin objectives of ensuring safety of women at workplace and gender sensitization have been established

in all public offices and establishments. Public interest advertisements for changing the mindset on gender issues are promoted by different department of GoM.

Women constitute 11.60 percent of membership in the cooperatives (Patel, 2006). In the rural Maharashtra, the work participation rate of women was 46.5 percent out of which 89 percent in the agrarian sector in 2001. Among the total agrarian workforce, 41 percent constituted cultivators and 48 percent constituted agricultural labourers. In the Urban Maharashtra, the female work participation rate (Main Workers who got employment for 8 hours per day for 183 days in a year) is only 13 percent. Out of total urban female work force 1 percent was in the highly skilled jobs, 9.2 percent was in the house-hold industry, 45.3 percent was self- employed, 33.3 percent was in the regular employment and 21.4 percent was casual labour. (Development Update, 2002). Maharashtra has become destination for widened career options for women in service sector due to opportunities in information technology, bio-technology and management. The state has been pro-active in providing facilities and support system to women entrepreneurs from upper class and self help groups of poor women. As compared to most of the states in India, Maharashtra provides encouraging environment for women to enter male dominated occupations such as entrepreneurship, police force, driving taxi and rickshaws, engineering and architecture.

### **Demographic and Health Profile of Women in Maharashtra**

As per Census of 2011, Maharashtra stands second with its 35 districts in terms of population in India. Thane is the biggest district with a population of 1, 10, and 54,131 and constitutes about 9.84 percent of total population of the state. Growth rate in Thane is 35.94percent. Next come Pune and Mumbai (sub-urban) with population 94, 26, 959 (8.4 percent) and 93, 32,481 (8.3 percent) respectively. In 2001, Mumbai (sub-urban) was on the top with 8.9 percent share in the total state's population. Sindhudurg is the smallest district with population 8, 48,868 which is barely 0.8 percent of State's population. Hingoli, Washim and Bhandara with a share of population 1.1 percent each are the other small districts. Decadal growth rate of population has declined.

### **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Maharashtra**

As per 2011 census, birth rate in Maharashtra has gone down resulting into reduction in number of children from 2001 to 2011 to the tune of 6 percent. But the price of population control is paid by girl in terms of unprecedented reduction in proportion of birth of girls. Declining child sex ratio has emerged as a major problem for the state. During last decade, percentage of child marriages have reduced by half (Population Council of India, 2010), thanks to very successful campaign against child marriages thro' combined efforts of the Government of Maharashtra and NGOs such as Mahila Sarvangin Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM) and Stree Mukti Sangathana.

### **District wise Overall Sex Ratio in Maharashtra**

During last 10 years, only Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg have been found to have favourable sex ratios due to male out-migration to cities of Maharashtra while women headed households manage subsistence agriculture. In rest of the districts there has been a continuous declining sex ratio. The lowest sex ratio has been in Mumbai due to very high level of male in-migration.

Maharashtra has an overall sex ratio of 925 females per 1000 males. It has increased from 922 to 925 during last decade. It is mainly due to favourable sex ratio in 45+ age-group. Top five districts in Maharashtra according to sex ratio 2011 census are Ratnagiri (1123 female per 1000 males), Sindhudurg (1037 females per 1000 males), Gondiya (996 females per 1000 males), Satara (986 females per 1000 males) and Bhandara (984 females per 1000 males). Districts with high tribal population have better child sex ratios.

Bottom three districts are Mumbai with the lowest sex ratio of only 838 females per 1000 males, Mumbai suburban also has very low sex ratio of 857 females per 1000 males and Thane which has 880 females per 1000 males. Increasing in-migration of men is responsible for unfavourable sex ratio in these three districts. During 2001 to 2011, Population in the Age-Group 0-6 as a proportion of Total Population has reduced. But this reduction is comparatively more among girl infants as compared to their male counterparts.

### **Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in Maharashtra**

The child sex ratio, which indicates the number of girls born for every 1,000 boys, has fallen from 916 in rural Maharashtra to 880-a drop of 36 points. In contrast, the child sex ratio in urban Maharashtra has dipped from 908 to 888 in the last decade. Rural Maharashtra seems to love the girl child even less than the state's urban areas. The Census 2011 data shows that fewer girls are born in rural areas than in urban. CSR in Maharashtra has decreased at a rate of 3.29percent during the last decade. Maharashtra has only 883 /1000 (0-6 years). There are only 4 out of 35 districts in Maharashtra where the child sex ratios are above the national average of 940.

Top four districts in Maharashtra where child sex ratio is above 940 /1000 are Gadchiroli that has a ratio of 956 /1000. Chandrapur has a ratio of 945 /1000. Gondiya that has a ratio of 944 /1000, and Ratnagiri that has a ratio of 940 girls per 100 boys, in 2001 it was 952. (Table 4)

Bottom five districts in Maharashtra where child sex ratio is below 850 are Bid with only 801 /1000, Ahmadnagar that has 839 /1000; Jalgaon that has 829 /1000, Buldana that has 842 /1000, and Kolhapur that has 845 /1000.

### **Malnutrition among Women and Children:**

Studies on intra-household distribution of resources reveal that among the poorer households with gross malnutrition and nutritional deficiency, the deficiency among girls and women was 25percent more than among men. (Deostahli & Madhiwala, 2005). National Family Health Survey, (NFHS) 2006 has revealed that Anaemia among women in the state is around 50-60percent. High rate of inflation leading to high price of pulses, cereals and vegetables, non-availability of safe drinking water to the poor masses has proved to be extremely detrimental to women's health. For every three men using health-care facilities in India, only one woman does so. In the 0-19 age group, the death rate of girls is higher than boys.

The inadequate funds for the urban sanitation programme in each and every budget in the post-reform period for provision of clean water, toilets and sewerage has given rise to higher incidents of water-born diseases and has increased the burden of women in terms of nursing the sick family members. Also, the reduction in the quota of clean water resources by 38percent in the urban areas has increased the drudgery of working class women who have to stand in long queues for many hours to obtain one bucket of water.

### **Reproductive Health**

The powerlessness of women in making reproductive choices and the naive health staff with their mechanical implementation of top down population control policy is causing major harm to reproductive health of women. (Kulkarni, 2010). Maharashtra Government in collaboration with several health NGOs is involved in advocacy on issues impinging on reproductive health in the State including age of marriage, gender equity, gender based violence and sex selection. This involves development and dissemination of awareness material, training of public health functionaries, orientation and awareness of other stake holders, development of audio-visual documentation, social audit of implementation of schemes and programmes under NRHM, NUHM and ICDS. ([www.CEHAT.org](http://www.CEHAT.org))

### **HIV AIDS**

Maharashtra is one of the six high HIV prevalence states in India. At least 21 percent of India's estimated 5 to 7 million HIV cases are thought to be in this state. The number of reported AIDS cases from Maharashtra is 21,231, which is about 19 percent of the national total (Kundu, 2006). However there are an estimated 750,000 HIV cases in the state (UNICEF, 2004). NACO-Maharashtra Mumbai District AIDS Control Society (MDACS) and hundreds of NGOs are working to prevent and control HIV-AIDS. The percentage of HIV-positive pregnant women in Mumbai used to be about 1.4 till 2002, which came down to 0.5 in 2006.

## **Educational Profile**

As per 2011 Census, Maharashtra Ranks 12th among all states in terms of literacy rate that increased by 6.4 percent, from 76.5 in 2001 to 82.9 percent in 2011. Literacy may be the most encouraging story to have emerged from the Census 2011 data. With 8.2 crore total population, 4.6 crore men and 3.6 crore women are literate, taking Maharashtra into the elite group of states with over 80 percent literacy rate in the last decade. It now stands alongside states such as Kerala and Mizoram, which have traditionally been known for their literate classes. Over 82 lakh-or 83percent of the population that is over seven years of age are literate. Until two decades ago, in Maharashtra, only two in every three males and one in every 3 women were literate. However, the gender gap is still steep. “Although the overall gap between male and female literacy rate is nearly about 14percent points in the state, this gap is 19 percent in rural areas and 9percent in urban.

## **Role of Open and Distance Education in Women’s Social Development**

Distance education departments of universities in the State are attracting thousands of women who want to pursue higher education. Contact lectures are organized at the study centres and video conferences are organized by YCMOU and IGNOU for the distance learners. Documentaries on women’s studies, educational material produced by Education Media Research Centre (EMRC), Pune, are also found to be useful educational tools.

Street children, child workers, children of migrant workers and child prostitutes who have been rehabilitated cannot cope with formal education. Hence many NGOs have started open schools and mobile schools which offer a wide range of creatively designed tailor made courses for them.

## **Special Needs of Women from Religious Minorities**

Dr. Rajendra Sachar Committee’s Report (2010) on ‘Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India’ has stated that when compared to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes the growth in literacy for Muslims was lower than for the former and educational status of Muslim women was lower than their dalit counterpart. (Sachar,2011). Report of the Minority Commission of Government of Maharashtra released in March, 2014 shows that even after 7 years of Sachar Committee’s Recommendations, profile of women of minorities in Maharashtra has not improved. This demands vigorous efforts to integrate girls and women from minority communities, especially Muslims and Buddhists. There is an urgent need for sex segregated data for minorities, SC and ST so that realistic approach can be adopted to address their educational and skill development needs.



## **Women in the Work Force**

Occupational Diversification of women is taking place rapidly in the economy of Maharashtra. Educated women are getting jobs in the information technology; soft ware industry, call centres and other tertiary sector occupations. Bombay was the first metropolis in the world that introduced Ladies Special suburban local trains during peak hours for women industrial workers and office goers. In Mumbai, for highly educated, English speaking and verbally articulate urbane women, sky is the limit. Women entrepreneurs are making their mark in food, engineering, packaging, textiles and garments, beauty, chemical or pharmaceutical industry (Bhardwaj, 2007). It is the service sector, in which women's economic participation is increasing in Maharashtra. Growth of Information Technology has provided new opportunities to women. Computer skills have become a key ingredient for educated women's advancement. Educated women take up part time outsourcing work, entrepreneurship and marketing and skill up gradation activities (Goyal, 2007). Call centers are attracting sizable section of English educated young women.

## **Women in Agriculture**

According to the 2001 census, 89 percent of women in rural Maharashtra worked on farms; of these, 41 percent work on land owned by the family and 48 percent as labourers. Equal work does not mean equal pay; women get 25 percent less wages than men.

Women in rural Maharashtra account a significant share of wage labour in agriculture, typically providing crucial support for poor households. Their earning contribute significantly to household incomes, many of the agricultural activities that women perform go unacknowledged as work, so that rural women are sometimes referred to as "invisible farmer". Farm women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including from crop production in which field operations like transplanting, earthing up, sowing behind plough, weeding, harvesting, storage up to marketing and food processing etc. The study conducted on participation of farm women in development of agriculture in Marathwada region of Maharashtra revealed that Crop-wise and operation- wise employment of farm women for all crops who are engaged only in agricultural operation was 222.44 days while operation-wise employment for these category of women revealed that maximum proportionate employment was for weeding operation (30.80 per cent) followed by picking operation (14.16 per cent) and stubble collection (13.42 per cent). (Thombre et al, 2008).

The highest percentage of female work force is of women agricultural labourers who don't own assets, get seasonal/ casual employment and get less paid. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 is the most flouted law in the state. But Mahatma Gandhi National rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNRES) has changed women's lives

for better. Women take up this opportunity as means of economic freedom more than wage parity. It allows members belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities to take up work in their own fields and get paid for that. Women participating in the programme are reviving their degraded farms or making provision for water through other works. More than 90 per cent of woman workers are farm labourers or cultivators. A substantial part of their work is unpaid because they work in their farms. Now parts of women's non-paid jobs, like land leveling and digging a pond in their farms, are paid for. In drought-prone districts, like Ahmednagar, this has attracted women to the programme (Mahapatra, 2010).

### **Women and Livelihood**

Of the total number of Main cultivators in Maharashtra 39 percent were women and 61 percent are men. Assuming that some of the cultivator women may also be owners of that land we still have a very small percentage of women land owners. At the India level only 24percent women were found among total cultivators. Since 1990, Shetkari Sangathana has persuaded hundreds of families to in their areas of influence in rural Maharashtra to implement joint registration of land and housing in the name of husband and wife. Widows of the Farmers who have committed suicide during last two decades have also time and again expressed that monetary relief package offered to them by the government can be meaningful only when they are given share in land of their in-laws and natal families. NSSO has revealed that 11.1 percent of the households in the state are headed by females (Kulkarni et al, 2008a)

Maharashtra Policy for women adopted by the government of Maharashtra in 2001 had promised

- Statutory provision for reserving 10 percent of all income and land at the gram panchayat level under the control of women's committee.
- Government allotments and primary memberships of societies to be made in the joint names of husband and wife.
- Amendments in the Hindu Law of Inheritance (1956) for ensuring equal share of the movable and immovable property of the husband.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1993), under which Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were restructured, gave these local governing bodies the added responsibility of managing drinking water and sanitation. It was felt that the Public Health Engineering Departments and/or state water boards which till then were responsible for meeting domestic water needs were centralized, monopolistic and overstaffed, lacking accountability to users, especially the poor and the marginalized.

Because women are largely responsible for water collection, as well as for most of the agricultural work (around 70 percent), it is they who determine which water source is

used. Time and energy expenditure are major reasons why the source nearest home is frequently selected. Before pumped water became available, water-borne and water-related diseases were prevalent and trips to water sources long up to 8 km in the dry season. The study was carried out to ascertain how education could optimize the health benefits of a pumped water supply, particularly since the incidence of diarrhoeal disease in the rural Maharashtra is very high.

In rural Maharashtra, as in most other parts of India, class and caste positions usually go together, and in times of drought, awareness of caste and class privileges, and their associated discrimination, become further entrenched. So in drought-ridden villages which are supplied with water by trucks every few days, it is usually the headman who is supplied first, followed by other prominent residents, and lastly the lower income groups.

Another way in which water scarcity transforms gender relations is through male out-migration and desertion. Patriarchal relations and the low position in the caste and class hierarchies deny women these options, but leave them with the responsibility for ploughing the land, and managing an extended family. Women's relations with other women are also changed by water scarcity. More time spent collecting water can mean less "personal" time for women, so that the use of the water site as a common meeting place gradually declines.

Women's land rights are becoming an area of increasing urgency in Maharashtra. Women have historically managed the unpaid care economy and fulfilled the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, family care, collection of fuel, fodder, water, kitchen gardening, poultry and animal husbandry and provided food and nutritional security. As women's contribution to the economy and society at large remains unrecognised, largely underpaid and mostly unpaid, the need for women to be able to secure land and property has become even more critical.

### **Women in Informal Sector**

For women from economically weaker sections, the daily grind is taxing. Grim reality of 92 percent of women in the workforce who are in the informal sector has been documented by the researchers of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Nirmala Niketan, University of Mumbai and SNTD Women's University in Mumbai & Pune and Karve Institute of Social Work and Alochana in Pune.

In the export-oriented industries, the production of leather goods, toys, food-products, garments, diamond and jewellery, piece-rate female labour is employed, working from sweatshops or from home or from stigmatised labour markets. The relationship between the formal sector and the decentralised sector is a dependent relationship where the formal sector has control over capital and markets and the 'informal' sector works as an ancillary. Economic globalisation is enjoying piggy ride over the backs of millions of

poor women and child workers in the margin of economy. (Contractor et al, 2006). A shift from a stable/organised labour force to a flexible workforce has meant hiring women on a part-time basis and the substitution of highly paid male labour by cheap female labour. (Gandhi & Banerjee-Guha, 2007). Subcontract work, home-based production, family labour system, and the payment of wages on a piece-rate basis are jobs earmarked for women. (Nair, 2007).

### **Feminisation of Poverty**

Studies have shown that the burden of poverty falls more heavily on women than on men (Dani, 2007). The inequality in income and consumption levels between women and men has been accentuated in recent times (Deosthali and Madhiwala, 2005). Of the total households, around 11 percent are supported by women's income alone. In other words they are 'Women-Headed households' (WHH) i.e. households supported totally by widows, single unmarried women, deserted or divorced women. The women headed households are the poorest of the poor.

#### **Domestic Workers**

Mumbai has always absorbed women who are ready to work as domestic help. Many of them are female heads of the household. Barbaric forms of physical and verbal abuse, sexual exploitation and absence of occupational health and safety standards are marked features of their labour processes and labour relations. Social workers of Mumbai took lead in preparing Domestic Workers Bill demanding minimum wages, social security and safe work conditions for domestic workers which also constitute a considerable percentage of girl children working as maids.

### **Child Labour**

The number of girls working in the informal/unorganised sector for precarious wages has increased in informal sector. As per 2001 Census, there were only 1297 girls as main workers and 209 girls as marginal workers in Mumbai. This is a gross underestimation as field based researches have shown wide variety of jobs in which girls are roped in. The highest number of girl child labour is found in domestic work and waste management (Mhapsekar, 2006; Chikermane and Narayan, 2009).

### **Occupational Health and Safety**

Multinational corporations operating in the Free Trade Zones (FTZs), Special Economic Zones (SPZs) and the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) of India employ girls in their production units or hire them on piece-rate basis for home-based work which has been highlighted in a study by CEHAT. (Deostali & Madhiwala, 2005). Ritu Dewan's study of MIDC, Andheri (2004) reveals that high production quotas create mental and physical stress among the workers. Chemical hazards, improper ventilation and lack of

health and safety provision in the EPZs make these girl-workers victims of respiratory ailments, burns, ulcers, deteriorating eyesight. Young unmarried girls are of primary interest to the MNCs and TNCs, they will not fight for their rights because of family pressure to earn money. Corporate houses follow the same practice.

### **Women Vendors of Mumbai**

In 2000, National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI) organised a study of seven cities that included Mumbai. The NASVI study revealed that Most of the women street-vendors belong to the households in which the male members were once employed in better paid and secure jobs in the organised and formal sector. They became unemployed due to closure, lockout of their units or due to retrenchment from the job. Due to male unemployment their wives, daughters, sisters took to street vending to make ends meet. These women constitute 30 percent of the total female population. Women vendors operate on a small scale due to limited access to credit, extension services and input subsidies. They are not even unionised. (Bhowmik, 2007)

### **Waste Recycling Workers**

Urban areas are adding thousands of tons solid and liquid waste. Mumbai's growing affluence increases volume of waste. The city of almost 12 million people generates waste to the tune of around 7000 metric tons every day. In Mumbai, there are 50000-60000 street and dump site rag pickers with constituting about 60percent of the rag pickers and 20percent of children (Palnitkar, 2007). Even among one lakh door to door waste collector and recycle workers in Greater Mumbai, 50 percent are women. Pune's profile is more or less similar. (Chikermane & Narayan, 2009).

### **Safety of Women at Workplace**

Recent spate of attacks and murders of women employees of call centers has brought the issue of their safety at center-stage. In Mumbai and Pune, increasing number of employers of private and public sector are ensuring safety of women employees and workers as per the Supreme Courts directive (Vishakha versus State of Rajasthan, 1997) Employers organise discussion on Sexual harassment at workers' meetings, employer-employee meetings, etc. and prominent display of the Guidelines to create awareness about the rights of female employees. They are made to assist persons affected in cases of sexual harassment by outsiders.

The state demands from the employer to recognise sexual harassment as a serious offence, the responsibility of the company/ factory/workplace to prevent and deal with sexual harassment at the workplace and the liability of the company, etc, for sexual harassment by the employees or management. Increasing number of employers in private and public sectors are formulating an anti-sexual harassment policy which must

include “Freedom from sexual harassment is a condition of work that an employee is entitled to expect. Women’s rights at the workplace are human rights.”

### **Working Women’s Hostels**

In 2002, Maharashtra had 118 working women’s hostels with bed capacity of 8505 and 43 of them had Day Care Centers (DCC) for Children that looked after 1040. (Walokar, 2004). The population of working women is increasing in every state. A large number of working women have to find out accommodation in a town or city unknown to them, the working women’s hostel is a safest place for them to stay. However, the present number of working women’s hostels is far less than the requirement. This picture was seen in all the states covered by the study. The study team, therefore, suggest that the Department of Women and Child development should sanction more hostels district places.

#### **Quality of Life of Below Poverty Line population**

Survival struggles connected with collection of fuel, fodder and water takes heavy toll of rural and tribal women in general and pregnant and lactating women in particular. The budgetary allocation for fuel and fodder projects has declined drastically. (Patel, 2003). Privatisation of water resources has also increased misery of poor women. Public health measures to provide safe environment and to reduce women’s drudgery should be taken up on a war footing. Separate toilets (Indian style) for women in the community and public places must be constructed for working women to avoid kidney problems and ensure menstrual hygiene among working women and women commuters. Management of anaemia in pregnancy and low birth-weight babies is a major problem among the below poverty line population. The communities uncovered by ICDS centres are unable to meet nutritional requirements of this category of population. There is a scope for more ICDS centres in the state.

### **Self Help Groups of Women in Maharashtra**

Micro finance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has proved to be a strategic measure for organizing women in groups and promoting savings and thrift habits to gain access to institutional credit for their socio-economic development and empowerment. (Balsaraf 2007). It empowers women since it instills a perception of strength, self reliance and confidence when the poverty trap is broken. An important dimension of SHGs is the peer pressure, which the members of a group exert amongst themselves, which acts as a substitute for formal collateral in that it is taken as the guarantee for loan repayment.” (Sinha, 2007).

### **Crimes against Women**

Uncontrolled forces of hedonism and consumerism has taken heavy toll of women in terms of increasing crimes against women: pre-birth elimination of girls, abandonment of live or murder of newly born baby girls, child sexual abuse, gang rape, forcible

abduction of girls, trafficking of girls and women, dowry murders, domestic violence, murderous attacks on elderly women and caste-based violence against Dalit women. (NCRB, 2010)

### **Women in Decision Making**

Maharashtra was the first state in India to announce a Women's Policy (in 1994) for the empowerment of women. In 2001, a number of women-related schemes were announced. Among the many legislative provisions for women are:

- Management of 10 percent of funds and land owned by gram panchayats by women's committees.
- Distribution of houses and membership of housing cooperatives to both husband and wife.
- Equal share in tangible and intangible property of the husband (through an amendment in the Hindu Succession Act 1956).
- 30 percent reservation in government jobs, 25 percent reservation in the Maharashtra police force, and other schemes.
- Provision for pre- and post-delivery care for women, nutrition, vaccination of children under the Integrated Child Development Scheme.
- 33 percent reservation of seats in local government bodies.

### **Political Participation of Women**

Issues for Public Debate eSS Current Affairs, Patel on Maharashtra  
October 2014

Gender deficiency in democracy is a result of number of barriers and restraints that prevent women from joining the electoral process. Absence of any quota or affirmative action to promote the participation of women in the democratic process at the highest level is largely responsible for this deficit. The inability to pass the Women's Reservation Bill for more than a decade has led to grave injustice to women representatives and to the democratic process of the country. Despite making promises in their manifestos to provide reservation of seats to women, most political parties themselves shy away from giving seats to women candidates. In administrative services, women IAS officers have made their mark in governance in Maharashtra. There were 42, 42, 46 and 41 IAS officers working for different ministries of Government of Maharashtra (GoM) in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively.

### **Maharashtra Policy for Women, 1994**

The policy has not been effectively implemented in the agrarian sector where 89 percent of women in the workforce of the state find their livelihood. Wage differential between men and women in the state is around 25 percent. Though the policy ensures land-rights

for women, in reality the picture is dismal. Very few own and control land and command authority to influence agricultural pattern. The women headed household suffers the most. Such households are increasing due to desertion (Parityakta), widowhood, divorce and male migration to the cities and towns.

Survival Needs of Displaced Population due to Natural as well as Man-made Disasters  
Massive changes in the town planning in the urban Maharashtra have brought issue of displacement and relocation to the fore. Women have borne the major brunt of the dislocation slum demolitions and abolition of informal sector markets during the last decade. In this situation, State and civil society initiatives must facilitate the process of women's empowerment through ensuring women's housing rights and women's space in the marketing zones. The local self government bodies should reserve 10 percent of all houses/ flats/ industrial units/ shops in the market places for women. Capacity building workshops and training programmes for women should be organized. Gender sensitization of the decision-makers in the housing industry and the elected representatives of the mainstream political bodies should be given top priority. For formulation of gender-sensitive policies, experts on the subject should be inducted in the apex bodies of urban, rural and tribal housing projects.

### **Gender Audit of the State Budget of Maharashtra**

The allocation of funds for women in the state budget is less than 1 percent of the total. Gender audit of the state budget reveals that the amount allocated for promotive measures such as economic services is much less. The budgetary allocation is for protective measures, for distressed women.

Maharashtra state has a detailed list of the programmes /schemes benefiting women under 4 categories:

1. Women specific schemes where 100 percent of the allocation is required to be spent on women.
2. Pro-women schemes where at least 30percent of allocation and benefits flow to women.
3. Gender-neutral schemes meant for the benefit of community as a whole where both men and women avail these benefits.
4. The residual state specific programmes having profound effect on women's position/ condition.

Per capita expenditure of the Government of Maharashtra for women specific schemes was 28 paise in 2001-02. Maharashtra allocated 0.65 percent and 4 percent of total government budget to targeted women's schemes and pro-women schemes respectively during women empowerment year. Gender-neutral schemes in Maharashtra employ large numbers of women through public works programmes of construction of schools, canals, roads. The residual schemes benefit women via saving schemes for SHGs.



Women don't get major benefits of the state subsidies because the sectors that "are major recipients of the subsidies include power, irrigation, agriculture (cotton, sugar and onion), irrigation, educational institutions (grant-in-aid), transport, industry and dairy. Except education, other subsidies hardly benefit women." (Datar, 2003).

Current Concerns on Women in the Economy of Maharashtra:

### **Health and Reproductive Rights of Women**

- Pro-women schemes where at least 30percent of allocation and benefits flow to women.  
Concerted efforts are needed to halt declining child sex ratio and stop pre birth elimination of girls. The Health Department of Maharashtra needs to Reconstitute the State Supervisory Board as well as the Advisory Boards as per the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (2002) with representation of committed social activists and civil society representatives,
- Affirmative action of the state for not only social protection but also incentivising the girls has become need of an hour. Existing schemes for promoting birth of girls must be critically examined and reformulated in such a way that they are universal and are not linked to any kind of stipulations.
- Under Adarsh Gaon Yogana of Maharashtra State, felicitate villages who have been able to have a balanced child sex ratio.
- Along with food security, the state needs to pay serious attention to nutrition security for girls and women of all age groups.
- State should pro-actively support and replicate community based mental health interventions for women and children.

### **Education**

There is a need for an Action Plan aimed at creating more educational opportunities for girls / women at middle, secondary and higher education levels.

Some of them include:

- Lowering the direct and indirect costs of girls' education for parents.
- Developing relevant and gender sensitive curricula.
- Advocacy of girls' education that includes awareness generation about social and economic benefits of girls' education.
- Promoting training and recruitment of women teachers.
- Improving access to schools, especially by providing safe transport.
- Promoting literacy training of parents through television programmes such as Akshardhara and community radios.
- Using a multiple delivery system - formal, non-formal and alternative.
- Increased allocation for Maulana Azad National Scholarship Scheme for

Meritorious Girl Students Belonging to Minorities and its timely distribution utilization.

- Resource allocation for more schools, hostels, scholarships and subsidized transport for girl students.

### **Work and Livelihood**

Unorganised sector must have labour laws including those relating to sexual harassment at work place. Similarly gender biases in existing labour legislation must be removed. For example, crèches should be provided at places where thirty workers – both male and female work, instead of having at places where only 30 or more women work.

- Women's studies scholars in Maharashtra have stated that for bringing about change in rural areas, reforms and expansion of irrigation and drinking water facilities are a MUST. Creation of watershed assets through employment schemes to be owned in a democratic manner would go a long way in reducing inequalities.
- Recently held Maharashtra State Level Round Table on Women Empowerment Policy, 2001 recommended that the rules concerning SHGs should be made more flexible. Focus of banks should be on expanding banking facilities rather than deepening the same service.
- Women must be given 'the right to residence'. Hence putting private household property must be in the joint names of partners. Care, however, has to be taken that wherever women have property in their name, men did not appropriate it under the pretext of property being in joint name.
- Maharashtra should take lead in putting in place the labour standards for women in informal sector and domestic workers that include minimum wages, social security and safe work conditions.

Women's land and housing needs must be understood from the point of view of women's rights to dignified life. They should not face any discrimination in exercising their right to land and housing due to their caste, race, age, religion and ethnicity. State and civil society initiatives must facilitate the process of women's empowerment through exercising WHRs.

### **Violence against Women**

The government must put systems in place for safety of elderly through active cooperation of neighbourhood committees. Community based counseling centres where senior citizens can report their problems need to be established. For abused and homeless elderly women leading to physical injuries and psychological consequences, the state should provide shelter-homes managed by trustworthy management. Budgetary

allocation for implementation of PCPNDT Act., 2002 and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence must be increased.

### **Decision Making and Governance**

Issue of gender budgeting and auditing must be taken very seriously and must cover 'hard' sectors such as finance, monetary and fiscal policies, import export policies instead of focusing on soft sectors like health and education. Globalization had brought about structural changes that have been impacting gender. Apart from employment, it has affected sustainable development, has led to state withdrawing from commitments to social sector. No aspect of economic life is gender neutral. Therefore, every ministry at the Centre and State levels must have a women's division and it should be involved in all decision-making processes like planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring. As per human development perspective, earning and employment are not enough for liberation of women who need education, skills, freedom and opportunities. Development of women implies not only the acquiring of capabilities which are necessary to function but also guaranteeing women's entitlements. For long and healthy life of women in Maharashtra, women's component in social sector budgetary allocation should increase. Along with employment, women in Maharashtra need property rights, right to live, equitable share in family resources and voice in all decision making forums. Eventually human development is a process of enlarging women's choices.

### **Conclusion**

Government of Maharashtra has taken affirmative action to promote women's economic empowerment. MAVIM (Maharashtra Arthic Vikas Mahanigam) has played pro-active and supportive role for women specific economic ventures with perspective of efficient allocation of resources. Maharashtra State Women's Policy is trying to fulfill Strategic gender needs<sup>1</sup> and MAVIM is addressing itself to deal with practical gender needs<sup>2</sup>. Gender planning in programme implementation, engendering budget are becoming increasingly popular in the official policy making exercise. During the 12th Five Year Plan period (2012-2017), to ensure better results in terms of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for Maharashtra, that includes indicators such as employment, education, health, juvenile sex ratio, PQLI (Physical Quality of life index) and political empowerment; the government agencies, private enterprises and non-government organisations in the state will have to join hands.

Investment in women's development is a win-win formula for all stake groups-government, communities, administration, law & order machinery and investors. Women in Maharashtra must have say in all decision making bodies of rural and urban governance as they are playing crucial role for its sustainable development. Visibility of women in statistics and indicators in the district and block level data system is urgently

required so that proper allocation of resources, targeting of gender specific schemes and programmes can be done.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Strategic Gender Needs are different in different economic contexts and are determined by statutory provisions, affirmative action by the state, proactive role of the employers to enhance women's position in the economy and social movements.

<sup>2</sup> Practical Gender Needs are identified keeping into consideration, gender based division of labour or women's subordinate position in the economy. They are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and often are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as provision of fuel, water, healthcare and employment.

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