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## THE STATUS OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN INDIA AND THAILAND

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**Abstract:** Gender discrimination is the least of worries for women in India and Thailand, known otherwise as the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women. Other instances of violence against women has an astonishing and grim variety to it with acid throwing, domestic violence stemming out of dowry, rape, harassment and an assortment of others. In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a common place occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women. Thus it is a need of an hour to empower women in India and Thailand.

**Key Words:** Empowerment, Inequalities, Gender discrimination, Sexual Harassment

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**Introduction:** Empowerment is the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalized who share their own access to these opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively.

Women's empowerment in India will take a look at our rich heritage and enlightened societies of the past where women were treated as equals, the concept of "India" itself evolved quite recently, relative to the sum of its parts' histories. But the Truth is that in the modern India, the woman has always been a second grade citizen, no matter what its esteemed leaders have said or done.

The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics. A total of 2,44,270 incidents of crime against women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during

the year 2012 as compared to 2,28,650 in the year 2011 recording an increase of 6.4 per cent during the year 2012. These crimes have continuously increased during 2008 – 2012 with 1,95,856 cases in the year 2008, 2,03,804 cases in 2009 and 2,13,585 cases in 2010 and 2,28,650 cases in 2011 and 2,44,270 cases in the year 2012. West Bengal with 7.5 per cent share of country's female population has accounted for nearly 12.7 per cent of total crime against women by reporting 30,942 cases during the year 2012.

Thailand is a developing country located in Southeast Asia. Over the course of the past few decades, it has been going through various transformations. Previously, the country was known for its mistreatment of women. In the new constitution that was written in 1997, women were granted equality with men. However, despite the new legislation, discrimination is still present and apparent in the role of women play in government, at home and at work. Women are highly under-represented, are mistreated at home and discriminated at work. Additionally, sex trafficking is still a prevalent problem among women and children. Sex trafficking became extremely prevalent in Thailand during the time of the Vietnam War and has remained a

commercial industry ever since in Thailand. Despite some progress, Thailand has a long way to go before reaching gender equality.

In 2013, some 87 women came forward with reports of sexual abuse or to acquire counseling as a result of sexual abuse daily in Thailand, with most offenders known to the victim. The youngest victim was aged one year and nine months and the oldest was 85, while the youngest offender was a 10 year old boy who took part in a gang rape and the oldest was an 85 year old man who molested a young girl.

**Gender Inequality:** According to the Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled. Since then, India has improved its rankings on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI) to 105/136 in 2013. When broken down into components of the GGI, India performs well on political empowerment, but is scored to be as bad as China on sex selective abortion. India also scores poorly on overall female to male literacy and health rankings. India with a ranking of 101 had an overall score of 0.6551 in 2013, while Iceland, the nation that topped the list, had an overall score of 0.8731 (no gender gap would yield a score of 1.0). Alternate measures include OECD's Social Institutions Gender Index (SIGI), which ranked India at 56<sup>th</sup> out of 86 in 2012, which was an improvement from its 2009 rank of 96<sup>th</sup> out of 102.

Thailand was 69<sup>th</sup> in global rank of the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2011 out of 146 countries, with the GII value of 0.382 (where the GII values range from 0 to 1, with 1 representing perfect inequality). The GII has three components that reflect three dimensions of gender inequality: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity.

**Reproductive health:** Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality rate and adolescent fertility rate. The 2011 Census

birth sex ratio for its States and Union Territories of India, in 0 to 1 age group, indicated Jammu & Kashmir had birth sex ratio of 128 boys to 100 girls, Haryana of 120, Punjab of 117, and the states of Delhi and Uttarakhand to be 114. This has been attributed to increasing misuse and affordability of foetus sex-determining devices, such as ultrasound scan, the rate of female foeticide is rising sharply in India. Female infanticide (killing of girl infants) is still prevalent in some rural areas.

Gender selection and selective abortion were banned in India under Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostics Technique Act in 1994. The practice continues illegally. Other institutional efforts, such as advertisements calling female foeticides a sin by the Health Ministry of India and annual Girl Child Day can be observed to raise status of girls and to combat female infanticide. Immunization rates for 2 year olds were 41.7 per cent for girls and 45.3 per cent for boys. According to the 2005 National Family Health Survey-3, indicates a slight disadvantage for girls. Malnutrition rates in India are nearly equal in boys and girls. The male to female suicide ratio among adults in India has been about 2:1. This higher male to female ratio is similar to those observed around the world. Between 1987 and 2007, the suicide rate increased from 7.9 to 10.3 per 100,000. With higher suicide rates in southern and eastern states of India In 2012, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and West Bengal had the highest proportion of female suicides. Among large population states, Tamil Nadu and Kerala had the highest female suicide rates per 100,000 people in 2012.

In 2011, the mortality ratio in Thailand was 48, which implies that for every 100,000 live births, 48 women die from pregnancy-related causes. The adolescent fertility rate was 43.3 births per 1,000 live births to women ages 15-19 in the same year.

**EMPOWERMENT:** India is the first country where, since independence, women have the

right to vote to elect representatives for the National Parliament as well as State Assemblies. The women have equal right to contest any election subject to the fulfillment of other eligibility conditions. So far, 15 General Elections have been held for the Lok Sabha (Lower House). The per cent of women parliamentarians fluctuates between 8 and 12 Per cent in these elections. In the current Lok Sabha (as on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010), there are 59 (10.8 Per cent) women Members out of 545. As on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010, there are 21 women Members (9.0 Per cent) out of 234 in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). Overall per cent of lady parliamentarians stands at 10.3 Per cent.

While many faced resistance initially to their presence in offices of responsibility, over time, acceptance of women within the Panchayat Raj framework has been increasing. Of the 28 lakhs elected Panchayat representatives, around 10 lakhs are estimated to be women. The average of women representation in Panchayats across the country is 36.94 Per cent. As per the Census of Central Government Employees conducted by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, out of total 31.16 lakhs regular civilian employees as on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, 3.20 lakhs were women. The proportion of women in the total employment shows an increasing trend. It was 10.28 Per cent in 2006 against 9.68 Per cent in 2004 and 7.53 Per cent in 2001. Central Government Ministries with highest share of women employees in 2006 were from Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (13.48 Per cent), Ministry of Defence (10.56 Per cent) and Ministry of Railways (7.11 Per cent).

In Thailand, the share of parliament seats held by women and men and the attainment of secondary and higher education by each gender have been used as measures of empowerment of women, according to the GII. As of 2011, women held 14 per cent of parliament seats which represents an

improvement over the 9.2 per cent held in 2001. In 2011, Yingluck Shinawatra was selected as the first female Prime Minister of Thailand

**Economic activity:** Economic activity in the GII is measured by labour force participation rate, which is the proportion of the country's working-age population that engages in the labour market. The labour force participation rate of women was 80.7 in 2013. Nancy Lockwood of Society for Human Resource Management, the world's largest human resources association with members in 140 countries, in a 2009 report wrote that female labour participation is lower than men, but has been rapidly increasing since the 1990s. Out of India's 397 million workers in 2001, 124 million were women, states Lockwood.

Over 50 per cent of Indian labour is employed in agriculture. A majority of rural men work as cultivators, while a majority of women work in livestock maintenance, egg and milk production. Rao states that about 78 percent of rural women are engaged in agriculture, compared to 63 percent of men. About 37 per cent of women are cultivators, but they are more active in the irrigation, winnowing, weeding, transplanting, and harvesting stages of agriculture. About 70 percent of farm work was performed by women in India in 2004. Women's labour participation rate is about 47 per cent in India's tea plantations, 46 per cent in cotton cultivation, 45 per cent growing oil seeds and 39 per cent in horticulture. There is wage inequality between men and women in India. The largest wage gap was in manual ploughing operations in 2009, where men were paid Rs 103 per day, while women were paid Rs 55, a wage gap ratio of 1.87. For sowing the wage gap ratio reduced to 1.38 and for weeding 1.18. For other agriculture operations such as winnowing, threshing and transplanting, the men to female wage ratio varied from 1.16 to 1.28. For sweeping,

the 2009 wages were statistically same for men and women in all states of India.

In 2011, women's labour force participation rate of Thailand was 65.5 per cent while men's labour force participation rate was 80.7 per cent. In 2011, the labour force participation rate of Thai women was 65.5 per cent compare to 80.7 per cent of their male counterparts. Thailand's economic transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the 1960s reduced the demand for labour on farms and, in the meantime, increased the demand for unskilled labour in the factories. As a result, unskilled female labourers migrate from poor rural areas to the urban areas to work for minimum wages or less, as can be seen in female workers tendency to concentrate in low-paid, low-skilled occupations.

In 2011, the majority of Thai women labour force concentrated in agricultural, wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing sectors, which employed approximately 39.17 per cent, 16.22 per cent and 14.63 per cent of the total female labour force, respectively, in comparison to 69.6 per cent, 8.1 per cent and 2.3 per cent, respectively in 1980. These figures demonstrate the large-scale reallocation of women workers from the agricultural sector to the retail trade and manufacturing sectors. In 2011, women accounted for 46.21 per cent of the total employment rate. Most of this employment was in informal activities. Out of the total female labour force, 62.49 per cent were occupied in the informal sector, which was nearly identical to the proportion of male workers who were employed in the informal sector. In 2011 male workers were heavily employed in the transportation, mining, and building trades while female workers were largely employed in clerical and service occupations.

As of 2011, almost one third of women in the labour force were unpaid family workers, in contrast to 16 per cent of men. Out of the total female labour force, 50.78 per cent are

engaged in the informal sector. Many of these workers work part-time or are temporarily employed in family businesses. In 2000, 7.5 per cent of employed female workers were reported to work as part-time workers. As of the first quarter of 2012, 43.93 per cent of Thai women, beside those who were too young or too old, were out of the labour force because of household duties and 22.21 per cent were students. Preference of workers and cultural factors that lead to job segregation are the causes of gendered wage disparity as well. The labour markets are embedded with societal gender norms that shape the preferences of employers and workers on choices of jobs that are appropriate to each sex.

In 2011, women and men workers in Thailand worked a relatively similar number of hours per week, except that 37.08 per cent of men worked 50 hours or more in comparison to 33.31 per cent of women. However, 27.55 per cent of female workers complained that they worked too hard. 90.99 per cent of the complaints from women workers in 2011 were that they received low pay in comparison to a 52.36 per cent of complaints from male workers, 5.05 per cent reported that they had no holidays and 13.15 per cent reported that they did not receive any form of work benefits. Another problem of labour market inequality is that women workers might face a "glass ceiling" in the workplace, which limits the opportunity of women to be promoted to higher positions and contributes to the gender wage gap. In 2007, only 22.2 per cent of the executive positions in the civil service were held by women, up from 9.9 per cent in 1992.

**Education inequalities:** India is on target to meet its Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education by 2015. UNICEF's measure of attendance rate and Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) capture the quality of education. According to Census of India 2011, literacy rate of

females is 65.46 per cent compared to males which are 82.14 per cent. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them are drop out. From 2006-2010, the percent of females who completed at least secondary education was almost half that of men, 26.6 per cent compared to 50.4 per cent. In the current generation of youth, the gap seems to be closing at the primary level and increasing in the secondary level. In rural Punjab, the gap between girls and boys in school enrollment increases dramatically with age as demonstrated in National Family Health Survey-3 where girls age 15-17 in Punjab are 10 per cent more likely than boys to drop out of school. Although this gap has been reduced significantly, problems still remain in the quality of education for girls where boys in the same family will be sent to higher quality private schools and girls sent to the government school in the village

The secondary school enrollment rate of women was 78.44 per cent in 2011, up from 13.45 per cent in 1973, whereas the secondary school enrollment rate of men was 69.86 per cent in 2011 and 17.71 in 1973. As of 2008, Thai female students were 54.28 per cent of the total enrollment in higher education. Out of all female students, 18.93 per cent were enrolled in higher education, in comparison to 14.43 per cent of all male students. Thai women are also enrolled at the master's degree level at a slightly higher rate than men, at 1.42 to 1.13 per cent, but slightly lower than men at the doctorate level, 0.125 percent to 0.129 per cent. Thai women have invested in human capital more than men in the 2000s. The higher education level of Thai women reduces the gender education gap in Thailand.

Empirical results suggest that although education tends to reduce segregation and discrimination against women in Thailand, it increases inequality in earnings between male and female workers. In Thailand, education level reduces total gender income

disparity by 7.04 per cent, which comes from 10.63 per cent reduction in segregation, 0.44 per cent reduction in discrimination and 4.04 per cent increase in inequality. Although gender wage gap still exists, the modernization has shaped the beliefs about women's education and currently status of female workers in the labour market is improved in comparison to the past in various aspects such as wages, working conditions and opportunities.

**Millennium Development Goals:**The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The third MDG is centered towards promoting gender equality and empowering women: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015"

As UNDP says India missed the 2005 deadline of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. However, the country has hastened progress and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in primary and secondary education has risen. Given current trends, India is moderately or almost nearly on track. However, as the Government of India MDG Report 2009 notes, "participation of women in employment and decision-making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015." Achieving GPI in tertiary education also remains a challenge. In addition, the labour market openness to women in industry and services has only marginally increased from 13-18 percent between 1990-91 and 2004-05. Thailand has mixed experience with gender equality. Thai girls and boys have equal educational opportunities. The labour market is open, and Thai women participate actively in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Thailand has successfully achieved most of the MDG

targets. As a result, the government is focusing on political empowerment and access to women's participation more broadly in politics and administration at the national and local levels.

**Conclusion:** If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual

exploitation, domestic abuse and any education or work. The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country.

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