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*Women's Economic Independency  
and Social Development: The  
Ushering of a New Dawn  
(An analysis based on the study of Uttarakhand  
Women)*

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The position of women and their status in any society is an index of its civilization. Women are to be considered as equal partners in the process of development. But women have been always exploited by men and treated as slaves kept under their control. Indian women have remained at the receiving end. Women in India have been the neglected lot. Women have been an active contributor to the development of a nation or a state. But their contribution is generally unrecognized and undervalued and shown a backstage. They have not been actively involved in the mainstream of development even though they represent equal proportion of the population and labor force. Uttarakhand women have been the backbone of the State's economy. They have always stood in the forefront during the struggle of State formation. Women are the mainstay of the culture and traditions of the hills. The life in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand is very difficult. Despite the adverse conditions, the rural women of the area portrayed immense potential and prominence in the society. Almost all the women in the society are employed in one way or other. For a proper understanding of social change taking place in the tradition and social structure of Indian society after independence, it is necessary to comprehend its unique past legacy. The Indian tradition is characterized by attributes like hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence. It is this structure of the Indian tradition that is exposed to the forces of social change. The issue to be examined is whether elements of hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence are being replaced by equality, individualism, historicity and this worldly rationalism including secularism respectively.

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Economic independence and financial security is an important goal for Uttarakhand women. There is a significant lack of opportunities for women in regional and hilly areas including limited transport options and of training and development opportunities. Education opportunities are identified as extremely important for the economic status of Uttarakhand women. Yet there are significant cultural barriers to Uttarakhand women's access to mainstream education providers. As women's work decisions are influenced by their social and professional development needs. Even though doing all the Economic works for the needs of the children and family women are conditioned to put themselves as the last option, always putting them last. It is a huge issue to assert her around money. The present study is an observation and exploration of the status of Uttarakhand women how they by their economic participation have changed the scenario of the Uttarakhand .Uttarakhand woman is better off because of her self-dependency. It's about being able to cope financially at times of personal crisis or changed circumstances.

Achieving economic independence for women has been at the core of the vision for gender equality across the globe. Economic independence is about expanding the capacity of women to make genuine choices about their lives through full and equal participation in all spheres of life. It is about recognizing women's work, paid and unpaid, as valuable, both socially and economically. It is about having policies and systems that value and celebrate women's contributions, and reflect the reality of women's lives.

But the potential of Uttarakhand women is not being utilized fully. There is a need to raise the status and standard of women in Uttarakhand. This can be done by promoting and encouraging women entrepreneurship that will give them social and economic freedom. Uttarakhand woman is a fusion of leadership, managerial skills, initiative and prudence. She reinforces the spirit of life in the hills. Uttarakhand women have always been emerged as a stand-by of the rural economy due to their total involvement with agriculture, forest protection, cattle care and dairying. The male members of the family usually migrate to towns to earn living. Thus, women in villages become the heads of the family. Even where the men continue to reside in the villages, it is the women and girls who look after the agriculture and cattle. For women there are several handicaps to

enter into and manage business ownership due to the deeply embedded traditional mindset and stringent values of the Indian society.

The most appreciable example of women entrepreneurs in Uttarakhand is "The women weavers of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand". Women from over 32 villages in the hilly region of Almora are involved in the processing of raw materials and production of woven and knitted products. The women weavers are earning their own income and have improved their standard of living. They can afford to educate their children and, in many cases, are the sole breadwinners in the family. However women in Uttarakhand do not own the land on which they are working. Nor does this give them the power to make decisions in major economic matters concerning property, sale and investment. Nor do the land yield so much production or income that it gives women the much needed cash and decision making power to look after her needs and those of the children. Despite being the heads of these households, women still cannot overcome the patriarchal divide. This lack of cash income and the gap between work and economic gain hence needs to be bridged by entrepreneurship among women.

In mountainous areas, the scope for economic diversification is based on more production and sustainable use of the limited arable land and other natural resources to produce high-value cash crops and commodities. This involves a move away from subsistence to market-oriented production pattern. Cultural diversity of the Himalayas finds its manifestations in the economic and developmental performance. Uttaranchal endowed with rich in highly varied resources has lagged behind in the pace of development. During post independence period government has sponsored a number of programs to enhance the income level of people and adequate infrastructural has been created but the stage of economy and environment continue to grim.

Participatory and sustainable development in the mountains has never been a priority in the macro-policy framework of the government. Two main factors are responsible for designing certain policy guidelines for Uttaranchal, the Indo-China war of 1962 and the Chipko movement of 1973-74. The Chipko experiences high lightened the conflicts between the "felt need" of the local people (especially women's priorities) and the "commercial demand" of the 'outsiders' reflected through

government forest policy. In his study of **Society and Culture in the Himalayas (1995)** K. Warikoo presents an integrated view of the ecological and geo-political imperatives, variegated ethno-cultural heritage, process of cultural interaction and impact of modernization on society and culture in the Himalayas. This book offers rich insights into the dynamics of social change and acculturation in the whole range of Indian Himalayas. **B. Sahni** in his book **The Himalayan uplift since the advent of man** points out the development efforts and modernization of all aspects of life which was bound to have strong impact on the traditional social system and culture of Uttarakhand. One of the noticeable changes is seen in the life-style of the people. As is normal with the initial phase of modernization, there is deterioration in the value system. With the decline of traditional society hold of religion over people also weakened. The attitude of younger generation towards religion is by and large one of indifference. It is mainly due to the fact that they have no opportunity to learn about their own religion in schools and colleges under modern educational system. **Uttaranchal Dilemma of Plenties and Scarcities** by **Vishwambhar Prasad Sati** and **Kamlesh Kumar** is an effort to present an account of the resources of the region, society, culture and the interrelationship between the people and nature. The whole study reveals that if the time-bound policies and proper implementation of the planning is undertaken, this state will progress and secure a respectful place in the federal structure of India. **Manikyamba (1990)** in his study has pointed out that “A trend of revitalization in the context of political participation of rural women is evident & that the development psyche can be noticed in them. Men’s attitude towards women’s entry into politics & leadership positions has also changed. The situation has moved from one of total rejection to limit the objection & in some cases active encouragement too. **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** in his book **Women and Economics** has pointed out the following Dominant themes: the transformation of marriage, the family, and the home, with her central argument: “the economic independence and specialization of women as essential to the improvement of marriage, motherhood, domestic industry, and racial improvement.” Centrally, Gilman argues that women must change their cultural identities. She mentions that humans are the only species in which the female has to depend on the male for

survival. This dependence requires women to pay off their debt through domestic services, or “sex-functions”. Gilman argues that women “work longer and harder than most men, and not solely in maternal duties.” Further, Gilman states that female activities in general are directed by men. These sexual distinctions have led to an odd distribution of power and have been detrimental to both genders, in Gilman’s view.

Gilman was one of the first to propose the professionalization of housework, encouraging women to hire housekeepers and cooks to release them from housework. Gilman envisioned kitchen less houses and designed cooperative kitchens in city apartment buildings which would further help women balance work and family and provide some social support for wives who still were still homebound. This would allow women to participate in the workforce and lead a more worldly life. Gilman believed that women could desire home and family life, but should not have to retain complete responsibility of these areas. Gilman stated that these changes would eventually result in “better motherhood and fatherhood, better babyhood and childhood, better food, better homes, better society.” **Broom in his study Work and Motivation** points out the causes of Social Development and the role of Women. He has discussed on the motives of encouragement and how by women’s positive attitude the arrow of sustainable development fulfils. Work culture in women has made them capable of Social changes. This study is remarkable for the contribution of women and Social Development. **Jyoti Mitra in her study Women & society: Equality & Empowerment** has focused on the changing status of women and the Ideologies of men towards women. Now the society has understood the reality that without women’s participation and support the needs for social development cannot be achieved. She has very clearly depicted that how women are becoming aware towards their rights.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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This part is primarily devoted to two important issues: the definition of the concept of social change around which the central theme of the present work revolves; and the approaches to the study of social change in India.

Finally, a conceptual integration is needed with regard to the

nature of phenomena subjected to the process of change. Most of the studies in the area of social change address themselves to the culture and social structures which are intimately related. Factors perceived as responsible for change in the traditional Uttarakhand social system are as following:

1. Desire for securing social and economic power.
2. Inspiration for status mobility.
3. Secular policies of the Government.
4. Western Civilization.
5. Desire for access to political power.
6. In the traditional Indian society, the ritual status was, by and large, considered superior to that of economic one.

## THE CONDITION OF HILLY WOMEN

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Women are the centers of the family. Though the role of women is very important and crucial in a hill economy, yet they are the invisible workers and lead a tough life. Women are actively engaged in all the activities right from the house to the fields. Interaction among women takes place during their work in the field and /or forest, kitchen, during washing clothes etc. sometimes they make courtesy visits to their neighbours. There is no strict *parda* (veil) system in the village. Women are free to move for marketing and other household activities but they have to cover their head with their *saree* as a token of respect to the elders. The cultural & environmental situation of Uttarakhand makes women to work hard for the livelihood. Thus they are not dependent on the man. They take all the decisions regarding family and farming. They contribute to the economic development of the state.

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