CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The Women of India suffer from different types of social customs and cultural practices from time immemorial. This is due to their less educational level low control over their own income less participation in decision making, access to production inputs and resources and employment opportunity than men. This vulnerable situation resulted in an overall dependency of women on through their life cycle. The dependency makes them a burden on the family and lowers their values of life.

Empowering women in the development process has been one of the prime concerns of almost all development strategies and progress related to women’s development. Development practitioners are determined to raise the empowerment level of women which makes them capable of challenging their dependency or oppressive situation in the family and society. It is possible only when women have full freedom to spend their income and resource. Women’s economic development is the key to their empowerment, gender equality, active civil society and good governance.

When empowerment is thought of, process of participation becomes imminent. Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. People may in some cases, have complete and direct control over the process and in other cases, the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access in decision making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human
Women’s participation is not merely increasing women’s physical participation in existing development activities, but it is actually as the process of empowering them to make development programmes people centred.

Within the framework of a democratic government, Indian laws, development policies, plans and programmes have ensured women’s advancement in different spheres. Constitution of India through its Fundamental Rights and Directive principles of State policy, stress gender equality, gender justice, non-discrimination and affirmative action in favour of women. There has been a continuous flow in the public policy in the first twenty years i.e., from 1951-1971 towards the welfare of the women. United Nations Organisation (UNO)’s policy on poverty alleviation programmes, gender equality and women welfare measures have propelled India’s policy on empowerment of women.

Despite the laws, plans and programmes, gender disparity manifests itself in many forms due to lack of vision in programmes and the unfavourable public opinion on the status of women. At first the plan developers conceived the notion that women are inseparable from their family and community life. Hence all the programmes executed in India in the 50s, 60s and 70s are based only on the development of community and family. However all those programmes ended in failure because women were considered as the “recipients of welfare only not as a partner of development”. Because of gender disparity and misconception government funds were not proper use, and hence the programmes didn’t register good success. In this situation the Government’s effort to uplift women was resurged with the Resolution of United Nations Organisation

(UNO) in 1945 on the women development accompanied by the financial support of international agencies. It activated the micro-finance institutions to help the poor in order to meet their needs for improving their economic status. Still the factors such as declining female ratio, domestic and social violence, discrimination against girl children, their inability to access health, literacy, income and resources, the denial of property rights in practice and the host of other social problems like dowry, alcoholism, destitution, widowhood, rape and the rest show that the women are not yet elevated. This gender inequality calls for sustained interventions from Government, Non-government organisations, State machinery, public opinion etc, towards reducing gender disparity and achieving gender equality. Women need social, economic, and psychological security and sustained encouragement to understand the situations they are placed in and make themselves capable of tackling it confidently and effectively.

At the time of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) declaration of the period 1976-85 as “Women Decade”, new policies were initiated. Hence in India in 1980’s, there was a remarkable change in the plans and programmes relating to women uplift in consonance with this new trend. Women were for the first time recognised as a separate target group and rightful place in the developmental planning and programmes was given to them. During this period the agenda of economic reforms in the global perspective was dominating the socio-economic and cultural fields. The process of economic reforms, more commonly referred as “globalisation”, is affecting practically each country in the world including India in some way or other. With increasing importance on accountability under the process of economic reforms, situation started changing in India. Participatory approach is gaining higher acceptance
since their role in success of development programmes are being accepted more widely.²

Nature and operations of economic development programmes targeting women in particular, are also changing under the overall impacts of economic reforms in India. Empowerment of women, one of the major targets of economic development programmes, is highly dependent on the accountability and participation of non-government sectors also. Thus the non-government sectors are becoming more and more involved in the process of economic development programmes. Hence plan and programmes concerning women have been shifted from “welfare approach” to the “development approach” in 80s. It called for a multi pronged but independent strategy that emphasized family centre poverty alleviation which would be independent on total development process.³

The strategy was to organize women around socio-economic activities by way of making their projects economically viable and adding to their social strength for the overall enhancement of their status. In this context, Empowerment as a concept was first brought in 1985, initiated by United Nations Organisation (UNO) in its Nairobi Conference. It is redistribution of power and control of resources in favour of women through positive interventions. In general empowerment means, an individual acquiring the power to think and freely exercise choice, and to fulfill the potential as full and equal movements of the society⁴.

“Empowerment of women” is a process well supported by development policies and programmes that could enable women to get-

² Plan Draft on the 8th FiveYear Plan, 1990.
enough strength to challenge their submissive social condition or status. It is a process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining great control over the sources of power and empowerment is to be attained through awareness, and control of decision-making process.

The period between 1992-97 which covers the era of economic liberalization and market friendly economy has enabled women to function to a certain extent as equal partners and participants in the development process of the nation. It also recognized the political empowerment of women as the central issue in determining the status and development of women. Therefore, the 73rd and 74th Amendment of Indian constitution (1993), provided one third reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women laid strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at the local levels, the most revolutionary step in the process of empowering women.

Next step towards the empowerment of women was taken in the period between 1997 and 2002. During this period, the Government focused on the empowerment of women, decentralization and people’s participation in planning and implementation of strategies. For the first time a sub-plan, purely for women was drafted which proposed empowerment of women both socially and economically, envisaged the promotion of self-sufficiency for women and aims at gender-equality. The National policy on Women’s Empowerment, enunciated in 2001, aimed at bringing about the advancement, development and empowerment of women by formulating and reviewing laws, policies, rules and regulations in order to achieve gender equality.5

Thus planning process for the development of women has evolved policy measures through welfare, development, and then to participation. All these plans with strategic outlook have brought out changes in the level of women folk with the object of empowering them. Yet, the mission is not get completed, because the uphill task of eliminating gender discrimination still remains insurmountable.

2. Objectives

The concept of women’s development has been talked about and explained by different people in different ways, but the essence of it is that, it aims at change and development in the position of women specially in terms of education, health, employment and making them self-reliant in such a way that they recognize their roles and perform them as equal partners in life both in their families and in society. Indian development planning emphasizes on providing equal opportunities to women by removing gender bias, empowering them and creating self-reliance among them. Based on this, women development policies have undergone tremendous changes in the recent years. Therefore an attempt has been made to review the women development policies, critically assess the programmes of the government towards the economic empowerment of women and to suggest possible strategy for the real economic empowerment of women in the society. The important point to offer here is that the policies and the programmes of the Central Government and the State Government of Tamil Nadu towards women are complementary to each other and hence analysed together.

Government of India with the provision for constitutional guarantee, implemented many plans and programmes to remove issues under which women suffered. Since the Government realised the gaps in
execution after twentyfive years of experience, new schemes were formulated for the “development of women” and then for the “empowerment of women”. The aim of the thesis is to trace the various steps taken by the Government of India from its First FiveYear Plan i.e., 1951 to the end of the Tenth FiveYear Plan i.e. 2007 and analyse its success and failure. It also aims at finding out whether the Government has come out of the hurdles in the way of achieving its target of “empowerment of women” of rural poor women of India by examining the implementation of various plans and programmes in Tamil Nadu. Further it also analyses whether true sustainable development has been achieved in India by studying a micro-level area i.e., Erode District which is one of the thirty districts of Tamil Nadu.

Hence this thesis has the following objectives:

1. To trace women issues and the various steps taken by the Government of India from 1951 onwards to meet the challenges in the uplift of women in India.
2. To study the impact of ‘Globalization on the welfare programmes of women of India.
3. To study the circumstances for the evolution of new programmes intended for the uplift of women by studying Tamil Nadu as a part of India.
4. To study the process of empowering women through group strategy i.e., Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Tamil Nadu.
5. To identify the factors contributing to the success for group dynamism.
6. To ascertain the sustainable development of women in India by studying the SHGs in Erode District of Tamil Nadu.
3. Scope

The Researcher hopes that this thesis may induce the future researchers to take on further research in such socio-economic aspects relating to women and thereby strengthen the studies on women. Further it may enable the future planners and developers of programme to evolve new strategy to make the rural poor women as a meaningful integral part of Indian Society.

4. Hypotheses

On the basis of the above objectives, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

i) Despite a long and sustained planning and implementation of welfare programmes, meaningful emancipation of women still remains elusive for reasons not explored suitably.

ii) The mindset of typical Indian women is so rigid that prevents them from coming out of the clutches of social and cultural customs as traditions.

iii) Public opinion of women has been biased for long, while remains a stumbling block in achieving gender equality.

iv) In such a complex situation, the only suitable alternative for women would be self-help groups.

v) Micro-credit system – a source for their elevation.

vi) Sustainable development achieved - real or illusion?

The hypothesis of this study has been scientifically tested with the appropriate tools.
5. Methodology

The study undertakes both descriptive as well as analytical methods on the basis of primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources are of various types that help us to build a contextual framework upon which the work is hard. The proceedings of State Legislative Assembly (MLAP), District Collectorate records (Erode District), Records of Block Development Office, Official publications from the Government of India and TamilNadu, give us enormous information regarding the study. Official publications by the Government agencies give us a lot of information regarding the schemes and their implementation.

As the thesis aims at assessing the impact of policy implementation of the Government feedback from the beneficiaries will integrate the structure suitably. Hence a questionnaire survey, by personal contact with randomly selected 300 sample women respondents of 100 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was conducted. The respondents were selected from the Mahalir Thittam scheme (Women Welfare Scheme) implemented in 20 blocks in Erode District. The study is based on multi-stage sampling technique, which enhances the quality of input. After assessing the Status of education, community and occupational structure. The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are selected for in-depth analysis.

In addition to these, oral sources have also been profitably used in this work. The discussion held with the officials of Erode District Panchayat Administration, Commercial and Co-operative Bank have yielded rich source of information. Vital statistical informations have been obtained from the Annual Reports of the Department of Social
Welfare and the records from the secretariat of Tamil Nadu Government. All these sources have obviously provided suitable base for the study and this is a pioneering study in this part of the State.

6. Limitation of the period of study and sources

The period of study starts with the year 1951 in which year implementation of the guarantee given by the Constitution of India for the elevation of women, started through its 1 FiveYear Plan. The Central Government promoted the schemes related to development of women and executed through the administrative machinery of central and state governments and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Tamil Nadu as one of the states implemented the Central Government’s plans and programmes as well as its own from this year. The study ends with the year 2007 when the Xth FiveYear Plan ended and a decade has passed by after introduction of programmes on empowering women.

There is a limitation for sources also. Though empowerment of women has been widely debated during last so many years, the availability of data from secondary sources relating to its evolution and performance turned out to be not satisfaction. Another important aspect of the study is the intensive interviewing of the households who got assistance or derived benefits from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under different schemes. The collection of primary data through field study by interviewing the respondents proved to be a difficult experience. Due to their habit of concealing information as well as extracting bare facts about implementation of the programme in the area under study, it is very difficult to come to the conclusion decisively. The Researcher applied all the techniques of better interviewing and persuading the respondents to
disclose the truth. However, it is difficult to say the extent to which the data collected are completely free from bias.

7. Tools of Data Collection

Bearing on the objectives of the study, two interview schedules, one for the Self-Help Group promoting institutions and the other for the members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were prepared. These data sheets were distributed to 300 members belonging to 100 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for collecting information from them. Furthermore, data were collected from the district officials, Bank Officials and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representatives. Sufficient care has been taken in processing the available data.

8. Review of previous literature

The Researcher undertook the task of making a survey of the existing research literature on the area of empowerment of women and of their sustainable development in India particularly in Tamil Nadu in order to become familiar with the explored areas. Some of the important works on this field are:

Dr. Roopa Vohra (1986) in her work “Status of Education and Problems of Indian Women” deals with the social and educational status of women in India and their problems at the work place. She suggests that horizontal methods should be substituted to vertical methods in order to improve the condition of women in one step today and another after every year and the follow-up action again to start a new political empowerment in India.
Dr. Mumtaz Alikan and Dr. Noor Ayesha (1986) in their work *Status of Rural women in India* reveal that sufficient amount of awareness is not gained by the rural women about the social organization or even the legislations after making a study on the participation of rural women in social organizations and their attitude towards social legislations.

Dr. Diran Devendra (1986) in his book "*Status and Position of Women in India*" highlights the legal and social problem of women in India since independence and point out that institutionalization of various enactments with regard to women have not been finalized.

K.K. Vidhya in her work "*Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots*" intends to focus upon various aspects of women functioning in the Panchayat Raj institutions and its impact on the overall development of women especially in the rural areas and the empowerment of women in India.

Sangeetha Purushotaman’s "*Grassroots Women’s Networks and the State*", contains the theoretical and analytical explanation of grass root of women’s movements in India. Another valuable literature is "*Employment, Evaluation, Knowledge and Tools for Self-assessment and Accountability*" edited by David M. Feltermay, gives a detailed account on method of empowerment of the women at the national level. "*Empowering Women for Sustainable Development*" by Leelama Devasia and V.V. Devasia reveals the necessity of empowering women for sustainable development. "*Women and Society: Equality and Empowerment*" edited by Joyatri Mitra seeks to profile the aspect of equality and empowerment of women, a cherished goal for long. "*Women and Development Policies and Plan Strategies for Women’s*
Development” edited by Chrtana Kallage evaluated the policies and plan strategies for the development of women in India.

Susila Agarwal’s (1988) edited work “Status of women: Analysis of constitutional, legal and religious aspects of status of women,” and another edited work of Dr. S.C. Bhatia, “Women’s Development: Grass root level Experience” come to the conclusion that the gender equality still remains a dream for the women labourers.

Dr. Radha Pandey (1989) “Women from Subjugation to Liberation,” focuses on the measures of the United National Organisation (UNO) to eliminate discrimination against women and highlights that the announcement of the International Year for Women (1975) created an awareness about women’s cry for equality.

Ramala M. Baxamusa and Shobha Joshi (1992) “Assistance for Women’s Development from National Agencies,” provides basic information about the various schemes of the government and other agencies. It also provides guidance to the women who need assistance from the Government and other agencies.

Dr. Neera Desai and Vibuti Patel (1985) in their work “Indian Women: Change and Challenge in the International Decade 1975-85” deal with the challenges faced by Indian women. They discuss the role of women’s organizations in creating awareness in the International Decade of Women.

Bathwala (1995) and Machotra (2002) are of the opinion that empowerment is a process by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources which will assist them to increase their
self reliance, and enhance them to assert their independent rights, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and the gender based discrimination against women. This will also enable them to organize themselves to assert their autonomy to make decisions and choices, and ultimately eliminate their own subordination in all the institutions and structures of society, they asserted.

Many studies have identified education, work participation, exposure to mass media and household standard of living as determinants or factors or sources for empowerment. “Education enhances a women’s position through decision making, autonomy, control over resources, knowledge, exposure to the modern world and husband-wife closeness”, say Jejeeboy (1996) and Kishor (2004) in the work Women uplift.

**Group Strategy**

Women’s gainful employment outside home exposes her to the outside world, delays age at marriage, provide a sense of financial independence, and increase her bargaining power and autonomy within the household and society, as said by Chen (1995) Pruthi Roll of women in Economic Development (1999) and Dixo Muellar (1993). Also women’s paid employment would alter the perception of women’s value and motive investment in the girl child’s education and health, provides a sense of financial independence by United Nations (1999). The investment power on women becomes evident through her participation in household, decision making, financial autonomy and freedom of movement as gleaned by Kishor (2004). Lack of decision making power by a women could result into lesser timely health seeking behavior and leads to greater adverse health consequences as revealed by Sundari (2004) in her work “Women Empowerment – A concept”
The input of empowerment also has to enhance her intrinsically by changing her attitude or ideology into egalitarian ideas, otherwise the power or autonomy she had gained, could not channel her to make welfare and development decisions. A fundamental shift in perceptions or inner transformation is essential for the formulation of developmental choices as suggested by A. Malhotre (2002). Non-egalitarian gender relations deny women an egalitarian decision making role during health care need and other family matters as opined by Jejeeboy (1998), she further suggests that positive change in the attitude could alter the current submissive image of an Indian woman as only a reproducing tool, homemaker, caregiver and subordinate.

Marilee Karl (1995) in his work “Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-making” says that Empowerment is of almost importance to sustain and accelerate the process of the development and to enable free and fair contribution of women to the development policy formulation and implementation process. His study also examines various aspects of empowerment like approaches to its patterns, influencing factors and successful strategies. Further he continues that empowerment is considered to be involved an interplay of four components such as collective awareness building, capacity building including skills development, participation with greater control and decision making power and action for greater gender equality.

The importance of Self-employment programmes over traditional social welfare programmes in promoting economic self sufficiency and empowerment of women has been studied in the context of the United States of America by Salome Reheion and Tecquelyn Bolden in their
work “Economic Empowerment of Low-income women Through Self-employment programmes”.

A totally reverse view has also been the outcome of other studies which hold that micro-enterprise development has not made any significant impact on the empowerment of women, as studied by Indrian Mayou (1995) in her paper titled “From vicious to virtuous circles: Gender and Micro Enterprise Development”. Further a linear process of empowerment has been suggested by the author connecting with rise in a women’s individual consciousness leading to greater mobility, greater likelihood of engaging in wage employment, greater decision making ability within the household and subsequently higher level of empowerment in the community.

The question of whether women’s empowerment is a product of favourable circumstances or it is due to skillful organizing of available sources has been examined in the context of women workers in the South African Canning industry in the 1940s and 1950s. In the specific circumstances which may not always be universal, organization of the women contributed greatly for their empowerment as studied by Iris Berger in his paper (1990) “Gender, Race and Political Empowerment: South African Canning Workers (1940 - 60)”

One of the most significant and comprehensive of recent studies on economic empowerment of women in South Asia is Marilyn Car’s “Women’s Economic Empowerment in South Asia”. This study examines through eight case studies on the experience of various non-governmental organizations in bringing about empowerment of women. Their experience proves that economic empowerment is the most effective entry point for the over all empowerment of women. The specific
economic strategy adopted by the organizations are financial interventions (increased access to credit), enterprise development (increased access to skills/business/management training and improved access to markets), bargaining (for higher wages/better working conditions/job securities), and socio-political strategies (traditional, religious and cultural attitudes). The above study aimed at understanding economic empowerment and is an important background to the present study which goes a step further to measure and quantify the extent of that empowerment in the specific context of rural poor women.

9. Sources

The present study departs from the above study in its focus on issues related to women of India particularly Tamil Nadu, the challenge which impeded the Governments efforts in the elevation of women and also the response of the women in empowering themselves and attaining sustainable development.

Group’s functioning method. Research papers presented in various seminars and conferences have also been used.

The sources regarding the introduction and implementation of various Government Schemes for self-employment of women in India particularly Tamil Nadu and their response were collected from the primary sources such as Government (Central and State) Department Records, Reports on “Mahalir Thittam”, State Legislative Assembly proceedings, District Collectorate Records (Erode District), Block Development Office Records etc. The Tamil Nadu Government’s Guideline Pamphlet on “Mahalir Thittam” etc were also consulted to get information on the administrative machinery and its functions.

Field survey was undertaken at 100 selected Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Erode District. This gave substantial information on the day-to-day affairs of the groups and the individual members, the result of Government’s effort to empower women socially and economically.

The newspapers such as The Hindu, The Indian Express, The Deccan Chronicle, Economic Times, The Times of India, Thinathanthi (Tamil), Thinamani (Tamil), Thinamalar (Tamil), etc. give use day-to-day information regarding the functioning of various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Tamil Nadu, views of leaders on the working condition of Self Help Group’s and its success and failure in Tamil Nadu. Official and financial institutions’ statements and reports were also published in these issues.

Thus it is felt that all the studies are related to either status of women or the role of women organization. Only very few studies are
available on the empowerment, and sustainable development of women by forming groups in India particularly in Tamil Nadu.

10. Chapterisation

After collection of sufficient research materials chapters are designed as follows:

**CHAPTER – I** INTRODUCTION gives a brief account of the central theme, objectives, scope, hypothesis, methodology, limitation of the period and sources, Tools adopted in the collection of data, review of previous literature on the broadfield of the thesis are given.

**CHAPTER – II** bearing the heading “WOMEN ISSUES AND SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT”, sketches the various social issues and problems under which the women were put in a precarious condition in the society. It describes how those issues were put under severe criticism by the leaders of various socio-religious reform movements, Christian missionaries and Indian Freedom movement and Dravidian movement and their contribution for the removal of such handicaps for women.

**CHAPTER – III** having the heading “CHALLENGE IN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT: PLAN AND PROGRAMMES” describes the factors which compelled the Government to bring poverty alleviating programmes for women and also discusses the success and failure of the women welfare measures. Finally it also discusses how the Government found a suitable method in promoting Self Help Groups, and succeeded in its attempt of empowerment of women.
CHAPTER – IV having heading “EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH GROUP STRATEGY” examines how the Government of Tamil Nadu implemented welfare measures for the development of women in this State by conforming to the Central Government welfare measures and International economic reforms. Secondly it also describes the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the empowerment of women and how the women of this State responded to those efforts of the Governments (Central as well as State).

CHAPTER – V with the heading “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: RESPONSE OF RURAL POOR WOMEN” describes how the women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) at Erode district in Tamil Nadu mobilised the rural poor women for empowering them to take a key role in rural reconstruction.

Finally the CONCLUSION is drawn on the basis of the studies of primary records and corroborated with the interviews conducted with the different types of members, literates and illiterates, and rural and urban belonging to the study area. This micro-level study on the sustainable development of rural poor women represents the macro level (regional level) rural poor women of the State as well as national and even global levels.