On India becoming independent the most important concern of the people and its leaders was to put the nation on the path of development. Various plans, policies and programmes were implemented so that India can develop. However this initiative did not reach certain marginalised section in the society such as women, majority of who continued to live in poverty. The Indian Government soon realised this and adopted a new approach called the empowerment approach so that women could take advantage of the development process. Since the 1990s almost all programmes targeting women are called as programmes for empowerment of women and women were looked upon as agents of change. In order to understand empowerment which is highly contested term it very important to first focus on gender power relations and to understand gender power relations it is important to have a grounding knowledge of the personal, local and also at the same recognizing how global forces shape these relations\(^1\). The feminist movements both at the global level as well as in India have played a significant role in challenging the power relations especially the power holder. Feminist Movement began in the Western world in the late 19\(^{th}\) century by the upper middle class white woman. They mainly focused on

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overturning legal inequalities particularly women’s suffrage. This movement in the 1960s broadened their debate to include cultural, social and economic inequalities. Women’s subordination was questioned and social science disciplines highlighted the role of power and gender relations in understanding women’s subordination. Social Construction of gender identity became central to the debate. Towards the 1990s the feminist movement, particularly feminist of the third world took up issues of gender and race and began to challenge the domination of white upper middle class women. The feminist from the third world were discontent with the prevailing economic models and development interventions which were Euro centric. The movement also attempted to demonstrate the concrete materiality of gender subordination as it is constructed by the rules and practices of different institutions, household, market, State and community. These issues were discussed at several international conferences and brought pressure on the governments of the third world about the need to bring about a change in their development policies. These insights from women’s movement have been co-opted by the state and development institution. This was reflected in the language of development policies in which the term women was changed to gender.

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4 Leslie Heywood, Drake Jennifer:1997 third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press ,p.10
5 Ibid. Arnfred Signe: 2000,
With this change from women to gender, issues of power became central to women’s subordination and inequality. Women’s organizations both at the international level as well as the national level put pressure on the governments pursuing development to have policies which will lead to women’s empowerment. Empowerment of women was a gender issue and therefore included men because only then was a change possible. But in process of theory being adapted to practice the meaning of empowerment was altered. The main objective of Empowerment Approach is to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men. To enable women to participate 1/3 of the seats for women are reserved at the urban and rural local self Governments, special strategies are adopted so that women can have access to resources such as credit, training and skill development, health care, violence free environment etc. Women were encouraged to form Self help Groups so that women can come together on a common platform to address issues that matter most to them. But despite all these efforts their concerns are not taken into considerations and seldom get converted to Policies. Women participation in a development agenda gets decided upon by the development agencies without taking cognizance of women’s concerns. The plans policies and programmes focus on providing access to certain resources and infrastructure which was so far denied to women and not on power which was central to women’s subordination. The

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7 Government of India, Ninth Five Year Plan, 2002 to 2007, Planning Commission, http://planningcommission.gov.in
development Plan and policies and Programmes tend to promote the power positions of men while many aspects like the work which women performed such as child care, food production for subsistence etc are not accounted by the Census Reports or the National Sample Survey Organization. Even in the Grama Panchayat level women who are elected to these bodies must prioritize their local needs and voice it before the Grama Sabha and Gram Panchayat. But many women are ignorant of the needs of their wards and do not participate in such planning. Empowerment as projected provides no space for involvement of women in the, planning process and institutional practices that set the overall condition for development. Moreover Empowerment has become an issue of checklist, and a plan to project the progressive side of the government or political correctness. The focus of empowerment has not been local/bottom up approach instead it has been top down /triple down approach. Besides the approach of planning has not been planning with women instead it is planning for women⁸.

To empower women socially the indicators taken into consideration are Health, Education and Violence. It must be noted that these indicators merely indicate the direction of change rather than provide an accurate measurement of social empowerment of women. There is no single method to measure empowerment of women. The Health status of Karnataka and especially of women is better when compared with many other states in India though there is still scope for improvements. There are several programmes

and facilities which the Government provides. But these initiatives do not reach the poor women due to corruption which is rampant in government run schemes. Most of the programmes and policies associated with health of the women have no doubt grown less narrow in focus and are more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the women when compared to the earlier programmes. The earlier Programmes viewed women as reproductive beings alone but in the recent years the policies and programmes like the RCH and NRHM have a more Holistic vision of women’s health in general. But it is also true that reproductive health is still the central focus of all the programmes and only noticeable difference is that the programmes are now offering a choice of contraceptive methods instead of pushing any one specific one. In order to make health care affordable and accessible alternative medicinal practices were also provided. The government of Karnataka set up the Department of Ayush. This Department is rendering health care and Medical relief to the public through Ayush (Ayuruveda, Unani Yoga and Naturopathy). It is well know that even before Allopathy treatments were available people were dependent on traditional methods. Every ecosystem will have its own solutions to solve the problems of that particular ecosystem. Women have knowledge of their ecosystem and the herbs which are available in their surrounding which have medicinal value. The traditional knowledge of health which women have can be better put use by involving women to meet the nutritional and health needs. The cultural and traditional practices which are beneficial and those which are harmful must be identified and awareness must be spread about these practices. This best example of
one such effort is of Mahila Samakya which provides information on herbal remedies called “Hithala Akka” (Handbook of Home Remedies). Women discuss and share this information with one and another in the community. Decentralized and localized campaign in the colloquial language about the traditional knowledge of health involving women must be undertaken. This knowledge base of traditional medicine must be dealt with scientifically and should be integrated into modern medical practices.

Education is considered the most important tool to eliminate gender inequality and to empower women. The Central and State Governments are making efforts so that it is accessible to all. The Sarva Shikshana Abhiyana which focuses on primary education and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shikshana Abhiyana which looks into secondary education are playing a significant role in trying to bring Out of School Children back to school through various programmes. In Karnataka it has been noticed that girls belonging to the SC and ST community are out of School. The reason for these children to be out school is because most of their parents are labourers who migrate from place to place in search of employment. Thus these children are unable to attend school regularly. Efforts are made to bring the girls from these communities to school but it is still to fetch results. With regard to higher education it has been noticed that higher education has failed to address issues of inequality and in many ways reinforced the patriarchal power. Education does not arise out in response to the individual needs, but it arises out of the needs of the society to which the individual is member. Higher education today is oriented to promote values of an urban, competitive,
consumer society. Through the existing education system many professional and technocrats have been produced, but there is a wide gender disparity that is found. Women are concentrated in outdated courses unlike men who by virtue of their position in society are able to take up courses which oriented towards the market needs. Education which has to play a crucial role in eliminating such discriminatory values has failed because modern education is more likely to enhance the skills required for the markets and do address the structures in society that promote discrimination and inequality. At the individual level role of education is to empower women to challenge internalised oppression. Education should enable women to increase self confidence and self esteem, a sense of agency and of self in a wide context and sense of being worthy of and having right to respect from others. These are the core aspect of empowerment, only then women’s self perception will change and internalized oppression will be challenged. To achieve this, education needs to be made an agent of social change.⁹

Due to the socio economic changes in the society, women are sharing space with men which so far, were only dominated by men. This has created a strange volatility in society and has led to increase of violence against women. Women has a group are vulnerable in a society because of the ideology of honour. According to this theory women are considered to be repository of family honour and the man is supposedly responsible to protect

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

10. The patriarchal society plays a significant role in restricting women’s mobility and controlling her sexuality, so when women share the public space, patriarchy controls women’s access and visibility to these places by determining the time, place and purpose. Women are seen as illegitimate occupants which is the cause of violence in public spaces. If traditional patriarchal societies treat women as property to be protected, the modern societies treat women as commodities, both these societies simultaneously co-exist in our society. In both cases women do not have control over themselves. A change in these power relations will emerge only through a consultative process where voices of all people, especially vulnerable populations are heard and given value.

Political empowerment of women was considered to be the most important tool to empower women. But in reality we find very few women at the highest levels of decision making such as the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and Vidhana Sabha. These women most often are from powerful political families and have rose to such position because of the political clout the families command. In Karnataka women who have become Ministers are very few and if they are often given soft portfolio such as Women and Child development and so on. It is difficult for many ministers to rule independently and often the party dictates the work to be performed. At the lower levels

10 Dube Leela:2000, November 11, Vol-xxxv No.46, Doing Kingship and Gender, Economic and Political Weekly
women do not participate in the political process at all. It is the 73rd and 74th Amendment (1993) to the Indian constitution which was a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structures for women. It provided for reservation of seats at the local level both in rural and urban areas. A number of factors limit the active engagement of women in the political sphere. Firstly deeply entrenched stereotypical norms relegate women to the domestic space, with severely restricted engagement in public affairs an area largely dominated by men. Secondly, caste and class restriction and the patriarchal system and mindset pervade the political space provided to women. Women are still not recognized as political entities and their perspective is seldom seen as integral to the design and delivery of services. The third factor is the lack of exposure of women themselves to politics and the absence of any experience in exercising their political responsibilities. Low literacy levels, absence of education and limited or no exposure, all lead to a lack of confidence and many women are unable to comprehend the true spirit of decentralization and recognize the opportunities that it provides. Many Nongovernmental organizations are making efforts to make women participation more effective but these organizations are still not able to reach out to the majority of the people in the state of Karnataka.

Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, many macroeconomic policies and poverty eradication programmes were
formulated to specifically address the needs and problems of such women. Micro credit is one of the most popular strategies adopted by the state to economically empower women. It is considered to be the panacea for poverty eradication. Women were formed into small groups called the Self Help Groups; the focus of these groups was small savings, credit facilities for consumption and production, group formation etc. The main consideration of these groups is to encourage women to start micro enterprises so that their income will increase and that women’s access to financial resources would give them a greater role in decision making at the household level. This strength was expected to trickledown and would enable them to take part in decision making outside their household and influence decision at community level or even help them to play political role. No doubt women have access to financial resources but are not in control of how it could be utilised. But it must be remembered that they were only performing the traditionally assigned roles, by performing such role they are only reinforcing the patriarchal norms. Access to financial resources has not given women the ability to question the hierarchy and discrimination within the family. The mobility, skills, access to information and support network was expected to bring about wider movement for social and political change. But in reality formation of Self Help Groups did not get converted into collective action of women to bring about a change. Self Help Groups brought changes at the level of individual in accessing financial resources but did not affect the deeper, hidden structures which shape the distribution of resources and
power in a society and reproduce it over time. However for any programme to translate into meaningful and sustainable process of empowerment it must address individual and structural relations in society.

International forces, national and regional governments have played a dominant role in bringing about development. Vulnerable sections of the society especially women have had to constantly adjust to the various development strategies, be it centralization, decentralization liberalization; all these have been top down approaches imposed on women. Women were not involved in planning these strategies of development and were thus reduced to being only participants in them. Empowerment approach to development is just another strategy which was imposed on women. Education of women, Reservation of seats in the Panchayat Raj Institutions and formation of Self Help Groups to access credit are the core aspects of empowering women socially politically and economically in Karnataka. Mere access to resources and participation without control over them cannot be termed as empowerment of women.