CHAPTER-3

SOCIETAL FRAME WORK & STATUS OF WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

Status of Women in India

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient time through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. As on since 2011, the President of India, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) were women. However, women in India generally are still exposed to numerous social issues. According to a global study conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women.

According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period however, later (approximately 500 B.C.), the status of women began to decline with the Smritis (esp. Manusmriti) and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity curtailing women's freedom and rights.

Although reformatory movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order, by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started from around sixth century.

The Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period when Sati among some communities, child marriages, and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life among some communities in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practised. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practised especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas.
In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for fifteen years, before she lost her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defended Ahmednagar against the mighty Mughal forces of Akbar in 1590s. Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan effectively wielded imperial power and was recognized as the real force behind the Mughal throne. The Mughal princesses Jahanara and Zebunnissa were well-known poets, and also influenced the ruling administration. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai was deputed as queen regent, because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. In South India, many women administered villages, towns, divisions and heralded social and religious institutions.

The Bhakti movements tried to restore women's status and questioned some of the forms of oppression. Mirabai, a female saint-poet, was one of the most important Bhakti movement figures. Some other female saint-poets from this period include Akka Mahadevi, Rami Janabai and Lal Ded. Bhakti sects within Hinduism such as the Mahanubhav, Varkari and many others were principle movements within the Hindu fold to openly advocate social justice and equality between men and women.

Shortly after the Bhakti movement, Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhs also preached the message of equality between men and women. He advocated that women be allowed to lead religious assemblies; to perform and lead congregational hymn singing called Kirtan or Bhajan; become members of religious management committees; to lead armies on the battlefield; have equality in marriage, and equality in Amrit (Baptism). Other Sikh Gurus also preached against the discrimination against women.

**Historical practices**

Traditions among some communities such as sati, jauhar, and devadasi have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some cases of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practised by Indian women among some communities, and child marriage remains prevalent despite it being an illegal practice, especially under current Indian laws.
**Sati**
Sati is an old, largely defunct custom, among some communities in which the widow was immolated alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the act was supposed to be a voluntary on the widow's part, it is believed to have been sometimes forced on the widow. It was abolished by the British in 1829. There have been around forty reported cases of sati since independence. In 1987, the Roop Kanwar case of Rajasthan led to The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act.

**Jauhar**
Jauhar refers to the practice of the voluntary immolation of all the wives and daughters of defeated warriors, in order to avoid capture and consequent molestation by the enemy. The practice was followed by the wives of defeated Rajput rulers, who are known to place a high premium on honour.

**Purdah**
Purdah is the practice among some communities of requiring women to cover their bodies so as to cover their skin and conceal their form. It imposes restrictions on the mobility of women, it curtails their right to interact freely and it is a symbol of the subordination of women. It does not reflect the religious teachings of either Hinduism or Islam, contrary to common belief, although misconception has occurred due to the ignorance and prejudices of religious leaders of both faiths.

**Devadasis**
Devadasi is a religious practice in some parts of southern India, in which women are "married" to a deity or temple. The ritual was well established by the 10th century A.D.[^22] In the later period, the illegitimate sexual exploitation of the devadasi's became a norm in some parts of India.

**British rule**
European scholars observed in the 19th century that Hindu women are "naturally chaste" and "more virtuous" than other women.[^23] During the British Raj, many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule etc. fought for the upliftment of women. Peary Charan Sarkar, a former student of Hindu College, Calcutta and a member of "Young Bengal" set up the first free school for
girls in India in 1847 in Barasat, a suburb of Calcutta (later the school was named Kalikrishna Girls' High School).

While this list might suggest that there was no positive British contribution during the Raj era, that is not entirely so, since missionaries’ wives like Martha Mault née Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell née Mault are rightly remembered for pioneering the education and training of girls in south India - a practise that initially met with local resistance, as it flew in the face of tradition. Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of the Sati practice under Governor-General William Cavendish-Bentinck in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for the improvement in condition of widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also helped the cause of women upliftment.

Kittur Chennamma, the queen of the princely state Kittur in Karnataka, led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Doctrine of lapse. Abbakka Rani the queen of coastal Karnataka led the defence against invading European armies notably the Portuguese in 16th century. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. She is now widely considered as a nationalist hero. Begum Hazrat Mahal, the co-ruler of Awadh, was another ruler who led the revolt of 1857. She refused the deals with the British and later retreated to Nepal. The Begums of Bhopal were also few of the notable female rulers during this period. They did not observe purdah and were trained in martial arts.

Chandramukhi Basu, Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi were few of the earliest Indian women to obtain educational degrees.

In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights, supported by the Indian National Congress. The All India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, stipulating fourteen as the minimum age of marriage for a girl through the efforts of Mahomed Ali Jinnah. Though Mahatma Gandhi himself married at the age of thirteen, he later urged people to boycott child marriages and called upon the young men to marry the child widows.

Women played an important part in India's independence struggle. Some of the famous freedom fighters include Bhikaji Cama, Dr. Annie Besant, Pritilata Waddedar, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and
Kasturba Gandhi. Other notable names include Muthulakshmi Reddy, Durgabai Deshmukh etc. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment of Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army consisted entirely of women including Captain Lakshmi Sahgal. Sarojini Naidu, a poet and a freedom fighter, was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India.

Independent India

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister.[26]

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

The feminist activism in India picked up momentum during later 1970s. One of the first national level issues that brought the women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station, led to a wide-scale protests in 1979–1980. The protests were widely covered in the national media, and forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists united over issues such as female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy.

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India, many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and other states.[27] Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticized the triple talaq system.
In 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements. For example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women came was passed in 2001.

In 2006, the case of a Muslim rape victim called Imrana was highlighted in the media. Imrana was raped by her father-in-law. The pronouncement of some Muslim clerics that Imrana should marry her father-in-law led to widespread protests and finally Imrana's father-in-law was given a prison term of 10 years. The verdict was welcomed by many women's groups and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

In 2010 March 9, one day after International Women's day, Rajyasabha passed Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies.

Education and economic development

Education

Though it is gradually rising, the female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them drop out. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. According to majority of the scholars, the major factor behind the improved social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy.

Under Non-Formal Education programme (NFE), about 40% of the centres in states and 10% of the centres in UTs are exclusively reserved for females. As of 2000, about 0.3 million NFE centres were catering to about 7.42 million children, out of which about 0.12 million were exclusively for girls. In urban India, girls are nearly at par with the boys in terms of education. However, in rural India girls continue to be less educated than the boys.
According to a 1998 report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum (majority of the female characters being depicted as weak and helpless).

**Workforce participation**

Contrary to the common perception, a large percent of women in India work. The National data collection agencies accept the fact that there is a serious under-estimation of women's contribution as workers. However, there are far fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men. In urban India Women have impressive number in the workforce. As an example at software industry 30% of the workforce is female. They are at par with their male counter parts in terms of wages, position at the work place.

In rural India, agriculture and allied industrial sectors employ as much as 89.5% of the total female labour. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour. According to a 1991 World Bank report, women accounted for 94% of total employment in dairy production in India. Women constitute 51% of the total employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises.

One of the most famous female business success stories is the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad. In 2006, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, who started Biocon - one of India's first biotech companies, was rated India's richest woman. Lalita D. Gupte and Kalpana Morparia were the only businesswomen in India who made the list of the Forbes World's Most Powerful Women in 2006. Gupte ran India's second-largest bank, ICICI Bank, until October 2006, and Morparia is the CEO of JPMorgan India.

**Land and property rights**

In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names, and do not get a share of parental property. Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property. In fact, some of the laws discriminate against women, when it comes to land and property rights.

The Hindu personal laws of mid-1956s (applied to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains) gave women rights to inheritance. However, the sons had an independent share
in the ancestral property, while the daughters' shares were based on the share received by their father. Hence, a father could effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but the son will continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, had no residential rights in the ancestral home. After amendment of Hindu laws in 2005, now women in have been provided the same status as that of men.[48]

In 1986, the Supreme Court of India ruled that Shah Bano, an old divorced Muslim woman was eligible for maintenance money. However, the decision was vociferously opposed by fundamentalist Muslim leaders, who alleged that the court was interfering in their personal law. The Union Government subsequently passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce) Act.[49]

Similarly, the Christian women have struggled over years for equal rights of divorce and succession. In 1994, all the churches, jointly with women's organisations, drew up a draft law called the Christian Marriage and Matrimonial Causes Bill. However, the government has still not amended the relevant laws.

**Crimes against women**

Police records show high incidence of crimes against women in India. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that the growth rate of crimes against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2010. Earlier, many cases were not registered with the police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation cases. Official statistics show that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women.

**Sexual harassment**

Half of the total number of crimes against women reported in 1990 related to molestation and harassment at the workplace.[27] *Eve teasing* is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. Many activists blame the rising incidents of sexual harassment against women on the influence of "Western culture". In 1987, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed[50] to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

In 1997, in a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court of India took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The Court also laid down
detailed guidelines for prevention and redressal of grievances. The National Commission for Women subsequently elaborated these guidelines into a Code of Conduct for employers.[27]

**Dowry**

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act, making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. In the 1980s, numerous such cases were reported.

In 1985, the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed. According to these rules, a signed list of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom should be maintained. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of whoever has given the present and his/her relationship to the person. However, such rules are hardly enforced.

A 1997 report claimed that at least 5,000 women die each year because of dowry deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional. The term for this is "bride burning" and is criticized within India itself. Amongst the urban educated, such dowry abuse has reduced considerably.

**Child marriage**

Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this day. Historically, young girls would live with their parents until they reached puberty. In the past, the child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaving heads, living in isolation, and shunned by the society. Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice.

According to UNICEF’s “State of the World’s Children-2009” report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

**Female infanticides and sex selective abortions**

India has a highly masculine sex ratio, the chief reason being that many women die before reaching adulthood. Tribal societies in India have a less masculine sex ratio than all other caste groups. This, in spite of the fact that tribal communities have far
lower levels of income, literacy and health facilities. It is therefore suggested by many experts, that the highly masculine sex ratio in India can be attributed to female infanticides and sex-selective abortions.

Ultrasound scans have been a major leap forward in the care of mother and baby, and with them becoming portable, these advantages have spread to rural populations. However, ultrasound scans can often reveal the sex of the baby, allowing pregnant women to decide to abort female foetuses and try again for a male child. This practice is usually considered to be the main reason for the change in the ratio of male to female children being born. In 1994 the Indian government passed a law forbidding women or their families from asking about the sex of the baby after an ultrasound scan (or any other test which would yield that information) and also expressly forbade doctors or any other staff from giving that information. However, in practice this law (like the one forbidding dowries) is widely ignored, and levels of the abortion on female foetuses remain high and the sex ratio at birth keeps getting worse. Female infanticide (killing of girl infants) is still prevalent in some rural areas. Sometimes this is infanticide by neglect, for example families may not spend money on critical medicines or even just by withholding care from a sick girl.

The abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India.

**Domestic violence**

The incidents of domestic violence are higher among the lower Socio-Economic Classes (SECs). The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 came into force on 26 October 2006.

**Trafficking**

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956. However many cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into prostitution, domestic work or child labour.

**Other concerns**

**Health**

The average female life expectancy today in India is low compared to many countries, but it has shown gradual improvement over the years. In many families, especially
rural ones, the girls and women face nutritional discrimination within the family, and are anaemic and malnourished.

The maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world. Only 42% of births in the country are supervised by health professionals. Most women deliver with help from women in the family who often lack the skills and resources to save the mother's life if it is in danger. According to UNDP Human Development Report (1997), 88% of pregnant women (age 15-49) were found to be suffering from anaemia.

**Family planning**

The average woman in rural areas of India has little or no control over her reproductivity. Women, particularly women in rural areas, do not have access to safe and self-controlled methods of contraception. The public health system emphasises permanent methods like sterilisation, or long-term methods like IUDs that do not need follow-up. Sterilization accounts for more than 75% of total contraception, with female sterilisation accounting for almost 95% of all sterilisations.

**Sanitation**

In 2011 a "Right to Pee" (as called by the media) campaign began in Mumbai, India's largest city. Women, but not men, have to pay to urinate in Mumbai, despite regulations against this practice. Women have also been sexually assaulted while urinating in fields. Thus, activists have collected more than 50,000 signatures supporting their demands that the local government stop charging women to urinate, build more toilets, keep them clean, provide sanitary napkins and a trash can, and hire female attendants. In response, city officials have agreed to build hundreds of public toilets for women in Mumbai, and some local legislators are now promising to build toilets for women in every one of their districts.

**Notable Indian women**

**Education**

Savitribai Phule was a social reformer who along with her husband, Mahatma Jotiba Phule played an important role in improving women's rights in India during the British Rule. Savitribai was the first female teacher of the first women's school in India and also considered as the pioneer of modern Marathi poetry. In 1852 she opened a school for Untouchable girls.
Arts and entertainment

Singers and vocalists such as M.S. Subbulakshmi, Gangubai Hangal, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle are widely revered in India. Anjolie Ela Menon is one of the famous painters.

Sports

Although the general sports scenario in India is not very good, some Indian women have made notable achievements in the field. Some of the famous female sportspersons in Indian include P. T. Usha, J. J. Shobha (athletics), Kunjarani Devi (weightlifting), Diana Edulji (cricket), Saina Nehwal (badminton), Koneru Hampi (chess) and Sania Mirza (tennis). Karnam Malleswari (weightlifter), is the only Indian woman to have won an Olympic medal (Bronze medal in 2000).

Politics

Through the Panchayat Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Although the percentages of women in various levels of political activity has risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decisionmaking positions.

Literature

Many well-known women writers are in Indian literature as poets and story writers. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Surayya, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai are some of them. Sarojini Naidu is called the nightingale of India. Arundhati Roy was awarded the Booker Prize (Man Booker Prize) for her novel The God of Small Things.

Government initiatives for empowerment of women Constitution of India and women empowerment

India’s Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution safeguard women’s rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically.
The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, DPSPs and other constitutional provisions provide several general and special safeguards to secure women’s human rights.

**Preamble:**
The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures justice, social, economic and political; equality of status and opportunity and dignity to the individual. Thus it treats both men and women equal.

**Fundamental Rights:**
The policy of women empowerment is well entrenched in the Fundamental Rights enshrined in our Constitution. For instance:

- Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favour of women.
- Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

These rights being fundamental rights are justiciable in court and the Government is obliged to follow the same.

**Directive Principles of State Policy:**
Directive principles of State Policy also contains important provisions regarding women empowerment and it is the duty of the government to apply these principles while making laws or formulating any policy. Though these are not justiciable in the Court but these are essential for governance nonetheless. Some of them are:

- Article 39 (a) provides that the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39 (d) mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 provides that the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
Fundamental Duties:

Fundamental duties are enshrined in Part IV-A of the Constitution and are positive duties for the people of India to follow. It also contains a duty related to women’s rights:

Article 51 (A) (e) expects from the citizen of the country to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Other Constitutional Provisions:

Through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1993, a very important political right has been given to women which is a landmark in the direction of women empowerment in India. With this amendment women were given 33.33 percent reservation in seats at different levels of elections in local governance i.e. at Panchayat, Block and Municipality elections.

Thus it can be seen that these Constitutional provisions are very empowering for women and the State is duty bound to apply these principles in taking policy decision as well as in enacting laws

Five Year Plans

Women play a pivotal role in the overall progress of a country as they constitute half the human resources of a nation. The economic wealth of a country is seriously depleted if about half of the nation’s human resource is neglected. Recognising the need for involving women in various development activities, the Government of India has initiated several affirmative measures by way of programmes and schemes to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative actions have brought about perceptible changes in the socio-economic conditions of women

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for removing the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. Advancement of Women through Five Year Plans There has been a progressive increase in the plan outlays over the last six decades of planned development to meet the needs of women and children. The outlay of Rs. 4 crores in the First Plan (1951-56) has increased to Rs. 7,810.42 crores in the Ninth Five Year Plan, and Rs. 13,780
crores in the Tenth Five Year Plan. There has been a shift from “welfare” oriented approach in the First Five Year Plan to “development” and “empowerment” of women in the consecutive Five Year Plans. Perspectives on Advancement of Women through Five Year Plans.

**First Five Year Plan (1951-56)** It was mainly welfare oriented as far as women’s issues were concerned. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector. The programmes for women were implemented through the National Extension Service Programmes through Community Development Blocks.

**Second Five Year (1956-61)** Efforts were geared to organise “Mahila Mandals” (women’s Plangroups) at grassroots levels to ensure better implementation of welfare schemes.

**Third, Fourth, Fifth (1961-74)** They accorded high priority to women’s education. Measures to and other Interim improve maternal and child health services, and supplementary Plans feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers were also introduced.

**Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)** This is regarded as a landmark in women’s development. The Plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment of women.

**Seventh Five Year (1985-90)** Development programmes for women were continued, with the Plan objective of raising their economic and social status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. A very significant step therein was to identify and promote “beneficiary-oriented programmes” which extended direct benefits to women.

**Eighth Five Year (1992-97)** It attempted to ensure that the benefits of development from Plan different sectors did not bypass women. Special programmes were implemented to complement the general development programmes. The flow of benefits to women in the three core sectors of education, health and employment were monitored vigilantly. Women were enabled to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental process with reservation in the membership of local bodies. This approach of the Eighth Plan marks a definite shift from ‘development’ to empowerment’ of women.

**Ninth Five Year (1997-2002)** The Ninth Five Year Plan envisaged: a) Empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes and Minorities as agents of socio-economic change and development. b) Promoting and developing people’s participatory institutions like Panchayati Raj institutions, cooperatives and self-help groups. c) Strengthening efforts to build self-reliance. d) The convergence of services from different sectors. e) A women’s component plan at the Central and State levels.

**The Tenth Five Year Plan**
Plan (2002-2007) was formulated to ensure requisite access Plan of women to information, resources and services, and advance gender equality goals. The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) proposed to undertake special Plan measures for gender empowerment and equity.

Highlights of XII Plan Five Year Plan (2012-2017) Related To Women Empowerment

The process of systemic transformation was set in motion during the XI Plan period. Challenges, however, remain. Women continue to face discrimination in terms of their socio-economic empowerment. This manifests itself in both the increasing violence against women as well as increasing feminization of poverty. Women have limited access to and control over resources. Lack of ownership of land limits their access to credit. More than 90% of the women in the workforce are in the unorganized sector. They face discrimination in award of work, disparity in remuneration and security of employment as they fall outside the ambit of labour laws. Added to this is the malnourishment suffered by more than 50% of the women. Further issues of women from marginalised and vulnerable communities and single women as envisaged in the XI Plan are yet to be addressed. The issues, therefore, are manifold and the XII Plan has to articulate the Vision to address them.

1. Vision of the XII Five Year Plan

The vision for the XII Five Year Plan is to ensure improving the position and condition of women by addressing structural and institutional barriers as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming.

2. Goals of the XII Five Year Plan

- Creating greater ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ for women by generating awareness and creating institutional mechanisms to help women question prevalent “patriarchal” beliefs that are detrimental to their empowerment.
- Improving health and education indicators for women like maternal mortality, infant mortality, nutrition levels, enrolment and retention in primary, secondary and higher education.
- Reducing the incidence of violence against women and providing quality care services to the victims.
Improving employability of women, work participation rates especially in the organised sector and increased ownership of assets and control over resources.

Increasing women’s access to public services and programmes through establishing and strengthening convergence mechanisms at multiple levels, creation of physical infrastructure for women and improving the capacity of women’s organizations and collectives.

Ensuring that the specific concerns of single and disadvantaged women are addressed.

3. Thrust areas for the Twelfth plan

The XI Plan had taken numerous steps forward. However, the targets set out could be only partially achieved. In the XII plan the Government’s priority would be to consolidate the existing initiatives and interventions relating to women, build upon the achievements and also move beyond to respond to new challenges. The thrust areas for economic, social and political empowerment of women for the XII Plan are derived from the concerns and barriers outlined in the earlier section and are discussed below.

3.1 Economic Empowerment

Recognising that economic independence is the key to improving the position of women within the family and in the society, the Plan would need to focus on enhancing women's access to and control over resources. Amongst others, this would entail not only increasing their presence in the work force but, more importantly, improving the quality of women’s work and ensuring their upward mobility on the economic ladder. The 66th round of NSSO (2009-10) provides insights on the recent trends in employment and education of women. One, it reveals that the female Work Participation Rate (WPR) (usual status) declined from 28.7 percent in 2004-05 to 22.8 percent in 2009-10. Secondly, it shows the concentration of women continues to remain high in the agriculture sector. The survey also highlights that vast majority of new jobs between 2004-05 and 2009-10 were created in casual employment, mainly in construction. Another significant feature is the increasing number of young girls and their retention in education, which may also be one of the contributing factors for the decline in the WPR. It shows that the number of girls in schools in the age group
of 5-14 years has increased from 79.6% in 2004-05 to 87.7% in 2009-10. Similarly, the number of girls in the educational system in the 15-19 years age group increased from 40.3% to 54.6% and in the age group of 20-24 years from 7.6% to 12.8% over the same period.12

Keeping the above trends in view, the XII Plan would endeavour to focus on increasing women’s workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors; ensuring decent work for them; reaching out to women in agriculture; financial inclusion; increasing women’s asset base and valuing their work. Additionally, the Plan would have to consider strategies to create job and skill training opportunities which would meet the aspirations of the growing literate work force of women.

Lack of adequate skills is one of the major impediments affecting women’s participation in the work force, particularly in the secondary and tertiary sectors, perpetuating their concentration in low paid sectors. The focus of the XII Plan would thus be on enhancing employability of women through skill development. It would also be critical that the training is not limited to traditional sectors but has relevance to the changing labour markets. The National Skill Development Programme (NSDP) has already identified 231 modular courses for women. Efforts will be made to link skill development programmes to NSDP to ensure relevance and enhance employability. Entrepreneurship development would also be included as an integral part of the skill training. Access of women from marginalised and vulnerable communities within these programmes would be ensured.

The needs of particularly the neo-literate would have to be targeted to enable them to move to skilled jobs. This would require going beyond vocational skills to include “thinking” and “behaviour” skills; computer and language skills; and skills that take into account the need of young women to migrate for jobs. The potential of the MSME and service sector as a source of jobs/enterprises for women would need to be fully realised. The focus of the XII Plan would also be on providing high paid job opportunities to post graduates and professionally qualified women.

The Draft National Employment Policy clearly states that there is the need to ensure that not only more jobs, but jobs that are decent and those that ensure minimum wages, safe working conditions and basic social security, are created. However, the
notions of equal pay for equal work have not yet been fully realized. Concerns of
gender discrimination in hiring and promotion and sexual harassment in the
workplace persist. The XII Plan would thus focus on strengthening of the
implementation of Equal Remuneration Act and Maternity Benefit Acts. The Plan
also reaffirms the need to pass the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at
Work Place Bill.

Considering that women are largely concentrated in the agriculture sector, a number
of reforms would be necessary to improve their productivity as well as their control
and access to land resources. The XI Five Year Plan had made suggestions for giving
women rights over land, credit, common property resources and equitable wages as
also enhancing their access to technology, education and skill training. Some aspects
of these have been addressed in the XI Plan. The XII Plan will continue to accord
high priority to these issues. Efforts will also be made accelerate the pace of creation
of alternative rural non-farm livelihood opportunities such as in agro processing,
supply chains, maintenance of equipment, rural infrastructure
development, etc.

Emphasis will also be placed on increasing self employment opportunities through
skill up gradation and improving access to credit and markets. Notwithstanding the
progress made by the microfinance movement, efforts for financial inclusion of
women in the mainstream credit system would be focused on in the XII Plan. To
achieve this, lending to women would need to be recognised as priority sector
lending, for which necessary directives by NABARD and RBI would be necessary.
An innovative strategy of setting up credit counselling centres for
women at district and bank level is being proposed in the XII Plan. The XII Plan
would also focus on exploiting the collective power of the women to make use of
economic opportunities by achieving economies of scale. While the number of SHGs
has grown over the last many years and more than 60% of these are known to be
women’s SHGs, their growth has not been uniform across States. The XII Plan would
encourage formation of SHGs throughout the country. It
would also be essential for SHGs to move beyond small affinity groups to formation
of clusters and federations in the XII Plan as these can play an important role in
activities relating to production, processing and marketing.
The Government has introduced a number of programmes to enhance employment and income opportunities for poor people with special targets for women. These, inter alia, include MGNREGA, SGSY, SJSRY, etc. The current efforts geared towards consciously including women as a beneficiary of employment oriented schemes need to continue. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has made a major difference by improving access of women to work, although unskilled in nature. Another positive outcome of the scheme has been a reduction in gender gaps in rural wage rate. The implementation of the scheme would need to be further strengthened to increase its outreach to women particularly in areas which are vulnerable to migration and trafficking.

Further, there is a need for such programmes to create productive employment for women with proper planning of works. Other infrastructure development programmes under Bharat Nirman as well as JNNURM will need to be similarly engendered.

3.2 Social Empowerment

Health being a pre requisite for improvement of survival indicators, priority will continue to be laid on increasing access to health services. The national demographic goals for IMR and MMR as set out in the XI Plan could not be fully achieved. The XII Plan will, therefore, continue to focus on persistent problems of high MMR, IMR, malnutrition and anaemia. The issues will, however, need to have a targeted approach to address spatial disparities as well as to reach out to the more vulnerable communities.

A holistic approach would be adopted so that the health needs of women and girls, at all stages of the life cycle, are addressed. The focus of health interventions would need to be extended to address ailments which women are especially prone to such as post menopausal problems, osteoporosis, breast and cervical cancer, etc.

Special measures will also be undertaken so as to take into account issues of older women and those affected by HIV/AIDS. Success of interventions will ultimately depend upon efficient delivery of services. The monitoring mechanisms will be strengthened. Gender audits of NRHM on the lines of MGNREGA will also be pursued to increase accountability, in the XII Plan.
Another critical area is education. Apart from enhancing women’s self confidence, education provides women greater access to information and resources and enables them to challenge various forms of discrimination and engage with the development process. With the enactment of RTE, access to primary education for girls has now become a legal mandate. This, coupled with the special measures already being undertaken under SSA to increase enrolment and retention rates of girls will continue to have a major impact on girl child education. While primary education for all girls is critical, the focus in the XII Plan would also be to address barriers to their entry in secondary and higher education. Also recognizing the KGBVs have emerged as a successful strategy to enable access to primary education for girls it is proposed to upgrade these at secondary level.

The XII Plan will focus on ensuring that the standards of quality of education are adhered to at all levels. This would include focusing on availability of teachers, proper class room environment and infrastructure, standardization of learning levels and adequate monitoring. Creating a gender-sensitive educational system is another priority. This would entail addressing sexual stereotyping, changing the attitudes and perceptions of school teachers, providing a safe and secure environment for the girl child, provision of schools within easy reach, transport and separate girl’s toilets. These measures would go a long way in enhancing enrollment of girls at primary and secondary levels.

Housing, drinking water, sanitation and energy needs impact the quality of a woman’s life. While in rural areas programmes like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) have increased women’s access to housing, this issue has not been adequately addressed in the urban areas. It is essential that women’s perspectives are included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter in urban areas also.

Special attention will be given for engendering schemes like the Rajiv Awas Yojana in the XII Plan.

In the XI Plan, special attention was given to improve the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation within accessible reach of households, especially in rural areas, through national programmes like NRDWSP and TSC. While Census 2011 figures would give an assessment of their actual reach and coverage, the XII. Plan would emphasise on ensuring women’s participation in the planning, delivery and
maintenance of such services. A gender assessment of the TSC has thus been recommended.

Acknowledging that a vast majority of rural women still depend on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy, the Plan will aim at promoting the programmes of non-conventional energy resources like use of solar energy, biogas, smokeless chulahs and other rural applications.

3.3 Gender Based Violence

Gender based violence and discrimination against women continues to be an area of concern. Reinforcing the women’s right to dignity, equality, freedom and bodily integrity, the priority in the XII Plan would be to provide a safe and protective environment to women both in the public and private arena.

The legal ground for providing such an environment has already been laid down over the years through enactment of several legislations like Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956, etc as well as through various provisions within the Indian Penal Code.

However, data on increasing crime against women, as discussed in the earlier section, clearly indicates that the legal commitments have, to a large extent, not been translated into concrete action. While enforcement of women specific laws has not been of the desired level, inadequate infrastructure and lack of dedicated staff has been the major constraint in ensuring women’s access to justice under the Acts. Gearing up the efforts of the Government in this direction would be a nonnegotiable deliverable for the XII Plan. To this effect, focus shall be on - strengthening the existing legislations that address violence and discrimination against women; making their implementation more effective; facilitating the speedy delivery of justice to women; putting in place adequate infrastructure and support services; and sensitization and capacity building of key actors.

Specifically, Acts such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956, would be reviewed to enhance their effectiveness. Stricter monitoring of response of enforcement agencies to violence against women would also need to be put in place. The justice delivery mechanisms
would be strengthened by improving access of women to legal aid and setting up of fast track courts to ensure speedy justice. Prompt action would send a strong message to the society and act as a deterrent to violence. Despite the multi-pronged approach adopted by the Government, trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation remains a challenge. Feminization of poverty and lack of viable economic opportunities for a large number of women and girls, are some of the reasons affecting the efficacy of the interventions. Increased migration and constantly changing patterns and trends relating to trafficking adds to the challenge of devising effective policy response. The focus of the government would thus be on providing alternative livelihoods options to women particularly from marginalised sections of the society. This would entail enhancing their employability through effective skill training, linking with poverty alleviation schemes and programmes of all Ministries and Departments in the Government, providing access to resources and credit facilities. The law enforcement response to trafficking will be strengthened so that those who are victims of trafficking are rescued and rehabilitated.

It is essential that victims of violence have an adequate support structure like shelter homes, medical facilities, counselling services for their effective rehabilitation. To address the needs of women in distress, schemes that provide shelter and other support services would also be strengthened in terms of quality and geographical reach. Shelter homes would be established in every district of the country with standards of care to ensure quality services. Also on the anvil is the implementation of a “Women’s Helpline” to respond to emergent needs. A new initiative undertaken will be to set up One Stop Crisis Centres providing shelter, police desks, legal, medical and counselling services, on a pilot basis.

Since the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) enacted in 2005, is the first law of its kind which provides relief to women who are victims of violence, the XII Plan will put in place a scheme for supporting State Governments in its implementation. Further, while some property rights have been given to women, for instance inheritance rights in ancestral property under Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (amended in 2005) and a right to residence under PWDVA, 2005, there is still a long way to go to ensure that women are recognised as equal partners in household assets. For increased awareness and knowledge dissemination on the legal rights of women,
effective use of ICT will be explored through creation of a national women’s information portal.

3.4 Women in Governance

India witnessed the world’s largest experiment in local democracy triggered by the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution. The reservation of one-third seats for women has resulted in more than a million women elected women leaders in decision making positions at grassroots levels. With the reservation already increased to 50 percent in several states, e.g., Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan and a Constitutional amendment to this effect in the process, the Panchayats will have great potential for women’s empowerment and their contribution to gender sensitive good governance. However, while affirmative action in terms of reservation for ensuring women’s political representation is an imperative step, it is not adequate to promote women’s leadership and their participation in governance.

Women face social, economic and various other forms of institutional barriers to entering PRIs and even in performing their duties as elected representatives. Important limitations to women’s participation include the terms of inclusion, the rules of decentralization, gender-based division of labour, the policy of rotation of seats etc. Social barriers such as lack of education, oppressive patriarchal and caste structures, lack of respect of women in PRIs, physical violence in public and domestic spheres, local politics based on caste/class/religious dynamics also affects the participation of women adversely. Further, uneven and limited devolution of powers and resources in the States, with no untied funds also adds to the constraints. Thus, although the number of women in elected local bodies in India has gone up significantly, the extent and quality of their participation in PRIs remains an issue of major concern. The thrust in the XII Plan would be to ensure EWRs effective participation in PRIs and in urban local bodies. For this the Plan will focus on promotion of their alliances, federations across women in PRIs and SHGs; preelection preparation of women candidates and voters; training and capacity building of EWRs as well as of government functionaries and officers. This would enhance their ability to raise critical questions about inequity, collectivize without fear and pressure and ensure gains from the services. Greater efforts will also be made to include poor and other excluded women in governance.
Women’s collectives such as Self-Help Groups have been found to play a catalytic role in enabling women to organize and articulate their interests better and engage in decision-making in the family and community. Women belonging to such groups are more likely to undertake a leadership role and develop the skills, confidence and support base required for entering PRIs as elected representatives.

Formation of SHGs would thus be encouraged and their capacity will be developed to play this role. Efforts will be made to establish linkages between women functionaries at the local level such as EWRs, AWW, ASHA, teachers and women members of SHGs so that they can be empowered by working collectively with a shared sense of solidarity. Involvement of NYK and NSS volunteers in supporting EWRs for social change will be encouraged.

Panchayats play an important role in effective delivery of services. It would, therefore, be the endeavour to equip EWRs to play this role and work for gender sensitive good governance in their panchayats by ensuring gender specific interventions. Capacity of EWRs would also be developed to work towards elimination of violence against women and girls including trafficking and universal education of girls.

Gender Resource Centres by providing information on legal, social and economic issues can enable women to perform their duties better. Setting up of such Centres will be taken forward.

### 3.5 Focus on Vulnerable Women

The Plan acknowledges that deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices make certain categories of women particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Single women, widows and deserted women are often victims of ostracism, harassment and violation of rights by their families, relatives and society as a whole. With increasing life expectancy of women, the challenges faced by older women are expected to get compounded in the coming years. The vulnerability of women from scheduled caste and tribe communities increases by virtue of their being from socially and economically backward communities. Migration for work such as domestic work, construction work, etc. deprives them of the support of their community and family, thereby enhancing their vulnerability. It is also important to reach out to women living with HIV and AIDS and who have been deserted by their family or women who have
lost their husbands due to HIV and AIDS without any social /economic support. In recognition of the diversity of women’s situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of specially disadvantaged groups, measures and programmes will be undertaken, in the XII Plan, to provide them with special assistance. The existing pension for widows and older women would need to be reviewed to make them more relevant to current standards of living. Specific attention would be given to the health problems of older women, affected by HIV/AIDS, diseases specific to occupations dominated by SCs, etc.

Access to education, particularly for tribal girls, would be another focus area through improved residential schooling facilities. Economic security for vulnerable women particularly single women and widows will be focused upon under the existing programmes of the Government such as MGNREGS, vocational training and livelihood programmes, etc.

Awareness generation programmes and provision of legal services especially for single women, those affected by HIV/AIDS on their rights and entitlements to property would be promoted.

To address the vulnerability of women migrant workers, the Plan also envisages a system of registration for migrant workers and argues the need to bring about a portability of entitlements for migrants particularly under PDS.

For tribal women, specific emphasis will be laid on improving their access and control over forests and forest produce. For this, the XII Plan would focus on improving implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act.

Collectives hold a special place in women's empowerment processes. The Plan would make a conscious effort and focused investment in the strengthening and mobilization of these women. The focus would be not only to improve their bargaining capacity as a group but to develop a more systematic interface with the government to demand their basic rights and entitlements.

### 3.6 Gender Responsive Budgeting

The XII Plan takes cognizance of the fact that policies and programs have a differential impact on women and men. As a result of this the unequal economic and social status of women may be perpetuated unless affirmative action is taken. This
would necessitate strengthening of gender mainstreaming and pursuing Gender Responsive Budgeting at all levels of governance. In the ultimate analysis, delivery of gender equality outcomes, to a large extent, would depend upon the adequacy of budgetary allocations. Gender Responsive Budgeting or Gender Budgeting as it is more commonly known, is a means of ensuring that public resources are allocated in an equitable way so that the most pressing needs of specific gender groups are satisfied. It translates stated gender commitments into budgetary commitments. GB has made reasonable progress in the XI Plan.

The GB initiatives will be strengthened in the XII Plan and its reach extended to all Ministries, Departments and State Governments. Steps will be taken to further institutionalize the GB processes. The focus would be to strengthen and empower the GBCs to enable them to undertake the envisaged role. Planning and budget approval systems will also need to be modified to make gender clearance and specific approvals of GBCs mandatory to ensure that PPS are engendered from the design stage itself. Orientation and sensitization at the highest level will be pursued along with capacity building of GBCs. The effort will be to institutionalize the training programmes through National and State level Institutes of repute.

National level gender outcome assessments through spatial mapping of gender gaps and resource gaps will be initiated. Ministries/Departments would be encouraged to undertake gender audits of major programmes, schemes and policies.

A quantum leap in this direction can be achieved if gender perspective is incorporated within the Expenditure and Performance audits conducted by CAG. This will be taken up during the XII Plan. Since sex disaggregated data is a major constraint in gender analysis, processes for the collection of standardised gender disaggregated data at national, state and district level will be put in place.

3.7 Institutional Arrangements

Strengthening of National Women’s Machineries is vital to achieving women’s empowerment. This includes the MWCD as the nodal Ministry and its attached and autonomous organisations, National Commission for Women, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh and the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW). The important role of MWCD is to facilitate mainstreaming of gender
concerns in policies, programmes and schemes of all Ministries and Departments, to
implement special legislations and welfare programmes and Schemes for women as
well as to undertake advocacy. To enable the Ministry to play this role effectively, its
women’s wing will sought to be strengthened in the XII Plan.

The mandate of the National Commission for Women is to protect and safeguard the
rights of women. The activities of the Commission include receiving complaints,
undertaking suo moto enquiries in cases of deprivation of rights of women, conducting
Parivarik Lok Adalats and legal awareness programmes and organising public
hearings. The strengthening of the Commission, in terms of staff requirement, is
underway and will be completed.

Interaction between the NCW and SCWs needs to be enhanced so that the monitoring
of legal safeguards to women is harmonised across the country. NCWs linkage with
the State Commission would be looked into in the XII Plan. For this the possibility of
teleconference linkage and assistance for awareness generation by the National
Commission to the State Commissions will be explored.

Gender being a cross cutting issue, various Ministries/Departments have been
undertaking measures for the empowerment of women. Convergence of these
programmes and schemes is essential to ensure that their benefits are
effectively accessed by women. With the specific objective of ensuring convergence
and better coordination among the schemes/programmes of various Ministries/Departments, the Ministry launched the National Mission for
Empowerment of Women. The Mission will be fully operationalised. Its role would
be to provide a strong impetus for reform by catalyzing the existing system, ensuring
better coordination and convergence of all development programmes impacting
women in close collaboration with grassroots structures and enabling participatory
approaches and processes. The Mission would work to achieve convergence at all
levels of governance. It would have an overarching role in promotion of women’s
issues across economic, social, legal and political arena. This would, inter alia,
include generating awareness; building strategies to question prevalent “patriarchal”
beliefs; establishing a convergence mechanism at multiple levels; formation women’s
collectives and improving their capacity to access the benefits of government
schemes, programmes, laws and policies; and developing empowerment indicators
relating to the survival, visibility, freedom and equality of women. The Rashtriya
Mahila Kosh (RMK) as the credit extending arm of the MWCD will be strengthened. It will be restructured as a non-banking finance company of systemic importance with an enlarged corpus of Rs. 500 crores. This will enable it to reach out to a larger number of poor, assetless and marginalised women for income generating, production, skill development and housing activities.

To enable all institutions to identify and respond to gender issues, the XII Plan will push for establishing Gender Focal Points within various organisations like the Ministries/Departments of the Central Government and Urban and Rural Local Bodies.

The process of engendering institutions would require that National Women’s Machineries are engaged in a gender analysis of not only programmes and projects but also of institutions like the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs,) judiciary, the enforcement machineries etc.

### 3.8 Specific Laws for Women Empowerment in India

Here is the list of some specific laws which were enacted by the Parliament in order to fulfil Constitutional obligation of women empowerment:

- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.

Above mentioned and several other laws are there which not only provide specific legal rights to women but also gives them a sense of security and empowerment.
3.9 Working Women the Backbone of Family in India

"Today there is no field where the women have not shown their worth. From holding highest public office in bureaucracy to holding highest political position, the women have shouldered all kinds of responsibilities with grand success. A lot of change has taken place, in their position in this man dominated society. With this gradual transition from household life to working women the sufferings of women have increased manifold."

During ancient days women have been adored and worshipped as goddesses. Our country itself is called 'Mother Land' in utter contrast to the fatherland of the West. In ancient period, several women occupied distinguished positions in society and played very important role. Maitreyi, Lilawati, Gargi, Katyayani, are some of the unforgettable names which can neither wither nor become absolute. The women have been adored since time immemorial as virtues incarnates. Saraswati is called the 'Goddess of learning'; Parvati, the Goddess of Chastity; Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth; Durga Kali, the goddess of Power and Energy. Manu, the great scholar said "Where women are worshipped there the deities are pleased". The women were the centre and foundation of the social and cultural life of the family. Home was the women's sphere of activity. 'Men make houses and women make homes' is the traditional belief. The duties of woman were just contained to bring up the children, and caring every family member with her loving and amiable, characteristics which she naturally owes. It was the traditional faith that man is for thy field and woman for the home.

Women who were the most dormant segment of India population have now become active participants in all walks of life. Till now, they were only unit of the family organization. Now, women are becoming not only a significant unit of the society but also influencing the course of social change in society. With the political emancipation of India, the women of free India ushered into a new role. Today the women enjoy equality of status, equality of opportunity with men. She became financially independent and economically sound, she became the major decision maker, and she became the policy maker in various new fields. She ventured into outer field, but the traditional views about her role as home maker, about! Her so called sacred duties of Mother, Sister, Wife, are still kept on demanding on her the
women are divided between her official work and home duties. Her duties start from early in the morning with many responsibilities on her shoulder before going to office, like preparing breakfast, lunch, getting kids ready for school etc.

During office hours she has to work equally or say more sincerely than her male counterparts. She has to fulfill her duties at home even after office homes. Her pathetic position, working at home as well as at office, is not admired, even by her husband or mother-in-law or father-in-law. The support and cooperation if extended by her husband in household; work is at his sole desertion. Husband is free to take excuses of over burdened work pressure of official exigencies, but wife is expected to be found fresh and amiable all the time. The men consider the household work as sole responsibility of the women. He considers working at home below his dignity and if he does something it is done as per his wish and convenience.

Women are an important element of our Society. The modern society has started recognizing the individual identity of women. She is believed to have her aspiration, abilities and qualities as a man does have and it is also agreed that she should have the opportunities to develop her faculties and to express them according to her own choice.

Women can help the society in various ways. They can engage in social activities and work for the betterment of the society.

Young educated girls can get engaged in a profession of her choice. We need more doctors, engineers, software developers, and social workers. The world cannot grow at good pace unless women come forward and take initiative for the development works.

They can contribute enormously in the field of health care. Women education will also improve the level of sanitation and hygiene.

As a mother, her role in the development of the emotional psychological aspect of the new born child has been also very significant. She was not only the creator and maintainer of her child but an educator and disciplinarian as well. The advantages of her working are as follws:

1. **Smart children:** The children of working mothers become smart and active as compared to the children of non-working mothers. This is because of the fact that the mothers being working have to move out of the house leaving all the household
chores intact, the children behind understand their responsibilities and manages to do all their tasks without being dependent on others thus become smart and active enough.

2. Independent: The children become independent as they don’t find their mother at home all day long and thus they are left with no other option than doing their homework, breakfast, packing bags for school, preparing uniforms and all such things of their own. Doing all those little tasks that a child can do on his own makes him independent and responsible. He or she no longer depend on others for their work and become co-operative to their mothers.

3. Inculcate good habits: The working mothers are now a day helped by their spouse in household chores after returning from work. By seeing the fathers being a helping hand to mothers, children learn good habits and inculcate manners of helping others as well as their mothers, thus in this way good habits are inculcated in them.

4. Mothers shower more love: The mothers who are working ought to remain away from home and their children for long hours and could not devote quality time with them. But the other way is good as well as when mothers are back from work and spend less time with their kids, they show all their love and affection for them. So this is also one of the advantages of being a working mother.

5. Financial help: A working mother also adds to advantage of helping the family financially. It is beneficial as a woman becomes a helping hand to the husband in terms of money. This way family runs in a very smooth way without any financial difficulty and the kids also get the best as parents are able to afford due to a good income level.

6. Kids get all facilities: The woman when works, will be able to help her spouse in money matters. This further helps in giving their children’s world class facilities as they are not short of money in any way. This way the kids get the best of all things. The kids are able to join extra classes and other activities also. In this way they become intelligent and spontaneous in their working. Those children stand different than the children of the non working mothers.

7. An inspiration for kids: The mothers when work, become an inspiration for their kids as they look up to their mom and say that they aspire to be like their moms in the near future. Working moms not only work but also look after their children without
any difficulty. So such kids need to look at others for an inspiration, but they get to see an inspiration at home only. This way, they also learn to do hard work in their life.

8. Life becomes exciting: Non-working mothers remain at home and are not more outgoing. This way they are not able to have or expand their friend circle, but the working mothers are able to do so and take their children out for outing whenever gets time. This way the children also learn socializing, communicating and behaving in front of others.

9. Good standard of living: A person can give his or her family high standard of living as the financial problem does not arise. The kids also live the life in a healthy and comfortable manner as all the comforts are provided by mom and dad. This is not exactly the case with non-working woman and their kids might remain aloof of all pleasures and comforts the children need in today’s era.

10. No dependence on husband: The working woman does not have to depend on husband for money or any other thing. She becomes independent and earn her own without relying on a husband. She is able to fulfil all her wants and needs without being accountable to anyone in the family.

The woman is now an important instrument of social change. The extent of woman’s participation in the corporate life is thus the measure of social change in India.

Women’s interest and participation in social life is increasing. This development is also the result of women’s education and secularization of social values. Women are participating in social organizations and are developing taste for leading a life of social involvement. Their interest in social and cultural activities is increasing. They have growing interest in travel and literary activities.

There is need for complete abolition of social practices such as dowry, sati, female infanticide, permanent widowhood, child marriage and many more. There are many people and organizations working including the Government that are working for improving the social and economic position of women.

In modern times, many welfare organizations for the women have sprung up. The women are becoming active members of these organizations and contributing their mite to the women’s welfare. Some of the welfare organizations have been formed at the national and state level and most of them are at local level.
3.10 Conclusion

India’s economy has undergone a substantial transformation since the country’s independence in 1947 and so the growth of women has also evolved. A section of Indian women—the elite and the upper middle class have gained by the exposure to the global network. Many of the working women, who manage their own expenses, do contribute towards the economic needs of their family as and when required. Unlike the earlier time they often participate in discussions at workplace where their views are also given equal importance before any final decision. After globalisation, women are bagging more and more job opportunities. It has raised hopes of women for a secured and elevated status of women arising out of increased chances to work but, at the same time, it has placed them in a highly contradictory economic liberty. India is the first among countries to give women equal franchise and has a high credible record with regards to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interest of women. But women continued to be denied economic, social and legal rights and privileges.