Chapter I

Introduction

Background of Research Problem

‘Empowering women’ has now become a frequently cited goal of development interventions. But what does the word ‘empowerment’ mean? According to the Oxford dictionary (Waite Maurice: 1998), the word empowerment means ‘Give power to delegate authority to give legal rights’. This meaning, however, neither seems to provide the throbbing dynamism and the professional features inherent in the word ‘empowerment’ nor does it reveal the prevailing gender inequalities and the oppressive burden of inherent social systems on the women especially in South Asian economies. The term ‘empowerment’, however, has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts, and does not cover easily all its aspects. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world include self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one’s values, capable of fighting for one’s rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability which are embedded in local value and belief systems. Although the concept of empowerment has been used since the 1960s in the literature on development and despite its current popularity, there is no international consensus on how to define it. The researchers, activists, development planners/practitioners, policy makers, international agencies and others attempted to give meaning to the term ‘empowerment’ and ‘women’s empowerment’. Some of the definitions used in the literature are given below:

i. The UNICEF Women’s Equality and Empowerment Framework emphasizes women’s access, awareness of causes of inequality, capacity to direct one’s own interests, and taking control and action to overcome obstacles to reducing structural inequality (UNICEF: 2001).

ii. According to UNDP Programme in Gender Development, transformation of gender equality envisages the empowerment of women, requiring conditions that
enable women to exercise their autonomy; it also envisages a process of self-empowerment in which women begin at re-examine their lives critically and collectively. While the former involves the facilitation of women’s access to and control over resources and the latter emphasizes women’s efficiency in seeking greater access and control. (UNDP: 1997).

iii. The definition used by the International Fund for Agricultural Development includes both access to productive resources such as land, water, common property, credit, technology, markets and the capacity to participate in decisions that affect the least privileged (Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty 1995).

iv. Other writers explore empowerment in different ways, e.g. in an extensive exploration of the term empowerment, Kabeer (1999, 2001) focuses on three dimensions that define the capacity to exercise strategic life choices: access to resources, agency, and outcomes.

v. Amartya Sen (1999) has written extensively on the importance of substantive freedoms and the individual freedom to choose and achieve different outcomes. Empowerment is, therefore, in the expansion of choice and action. Importantly it implies enhancing one’s capabilities that affect one’s life.

vi. Rowlands defines ‘empowerment’ both at personal and collective levels involving a sense of self-confidence and capacity; relational, implying ability to negotiate and influence relationship and decisions (Rowlands: 1997).

vii. Oakley identifies five key uses of the term empowerment in development studies, viz. empowerment as participation, empowerment as democratization,

---

1 Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty is a Consortium of Internal Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), Inter-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, The World Bank, The World Food Programme and European Commission i.e. committed to increasing the Poor’s access to productive assets, especially land, water and other natural resources. The definition of empowerment is drawn from the opening statement of the Population Coalition at SAO Conference at Netherlands in September 1999.
empowerment as capacity building, empowerment through economic improvement and empowerment and the individual (Oakley: 2001). He considers the link between empowerment and participation as the strongest in practice. Empowerment as democratization is concerned with macro-level political activity where empowerment is seen as the basis on which democratic structures and practices can be built. This approach leads to strategies of support for civil society structures and grassroots organizations.

viii. Empowerment defined as autonomy both for an individual and a Group encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with economic independence. In terms of this definition, access to and control over productive resources; knowledge and awareness of one’s self and society, and of personal needs, health issues, legal rights, technological innovations, and the availability of social and economic resources; and how to take advantages of them, self image i.e. realization of one’s capabilities and the potential and confidence to take action in one’s life, are the components of empowerment. (Hapke: 1992).

ix. Empowerment is the process in which people assume an increased involvement in defining and promoting their own agenda for political and social projects designed to enact change (Wilkinson: 1990).

x. The term empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenges basic power relations...Empowerment, therefore is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context (Sharma: 1991-92).

xi. Empowerment implies a fundamental redistribution of power between different groups. In the case of poor women the groups include families, communities, classes and agencies of government and intermediaries. It is a process of equity enhancement and can be achieved only through disempowering some structures, systems, processes, institutions etc. It is, by implication, an inherently induced process/ mechanism of change towards ultimate equality. Empowerment is the
vehicle which enables women to renegotiate their existence on an equitable basis (Benerjee: 1992).

xii. Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. Its parameters are- building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building up group cohesion, and fostering decision-making and action; ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society; providing the wherewithal for economic independence (Government of India: 1988).

xiii. Women’s empowerment is the process, and the outcome of the process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and the gender-based discrimination against women in all the institutions and structures of society. (Batliwala: 1994).

xiv. Empowerment required transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights, and other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate male domination (Sen and Grown: 1985).

xv. Sarah, has, however identified following aspects which seem to be generally accepted in the literature on women’s empowerment (Sarah Mosedale: 1998).

- For women to be empowered one must have been disempowered. It is relevant to speak of empowering women, for example, because, as a group, they are disempowered relative to men.

- Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party. Rather those who would become empowered must claim it. Outside agent cannot therefore empower women – the most they can do is to create conditions favorable to empowerment but they cannot make it happen.

- Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. There is no final goal. One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute
sense. People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time.

The term “Empowerment” has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely *individual* process of taking control of and responsibility for one’s life and situation, and defining it as a *political* process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. There are, therefore, many possible definitions of empowerment. These definitions of empowerment focus on issues such as gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one’s life; structural inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than focus only on individual characteristics etc. Capacity-building in general is often regarded as empowering, although there are many approaches, some of which seem little more than training. Empowerment through economic improvement is an approach which (unsurprisingly given women’s well-documented relative lack of economic power) has been extensively used with women. Based on the assumption that women’s relative powerlessness is primarily a function of their poverty, such interventions often focus on microfinance and small business development activities, targeted at women.

*In its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions, i.e. enlargement of one’s capabilities that affect one’s life.* As people exercise real choice, they gain increased control over their lives. Poor people’s choices are extremely limited, both by their lack of assets and by their powerlessness to negotiate better terms for themselves with a range of institutions, both formal and informal. *Since powerlessness is embedded in the nature of institutional relations, an institutional definition of empowerment is thus the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives* (World Bank: 2002, p. 12). In this definition, “Assets” refers to material assets, both physical and financial. Such assets—including land, housing, livestock, savings, and jewelry—enable people to withstand shocks and expand their horizon of choices. The extreme limitation of poor people’s physical and financial assets severely constrains their capacity to negotiate fair deals for themselves and increases their
vulnerability. “Capabilities”, on the other hand, are inherent in people and enable them to use their assets in different ways to increase their wellbeing. Human capabilities include good health, education, and production or other life-enhancing skills. Social capabilities include social belonging, leadership, relations of trust, a sense of identity, values that give meaning to life, and the capacity to organize. Political capability includes the capacity to represent oneself or others, access information, form associations, and participate in the political life of a community or country. Assets and capabilities can be individual or collective.

Given the fact that there is a reciprocal relationship between individual assets and capabilities and the capability to act collectively, poor people who are healthy, educated, and secure can contribute more effectively to collective action; at the same time, collective action can improve poor people’s access to quality schools or health clinics. Poor people’s freedom of choice and action can thus be expanded in various ways such as investments in health, education, and improving their skills which are of intrinsic value to them. This is not automatic, however, given the social, power, and communication barriers faced by disadvantaged groups including women. While the reasons for any particular woman’s powerlessness (or power) are many and varied, considering women per se necessarily involves questioning what we/they have in common in this respect. The common factor is that, as women, they are all constrained by “the norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men” (Kabeer: 2000). The specific ways in which this operates vary culturally and over time. In one situation it might reveal itself in women’s lower incomes relative to men, in another it might be seen in the relative survival rates of girl and boy children and in a third by severe restrictions on women’s mobility. Virtually everywhere it can be seen in domestic violence, male-dominated decision fora and women’s inferior access to assets of many kinds. A woman’s level of empowerment will vary, sometimes enormously, according to other criteria such as her class or caste, ethnicity, relative wealth, age, family position etc and any analysis of women’s power or lack of it must appreciate these other contributory dimensions. Nevertheless, focusing on the empowerment of women as a group requires an analysis of gender relations i.e. the ways in which power relations between the sexes are constructed and maintained
Empowerment of these disadvantaged groups thus means,” Changing unequal institutional relationships both in formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions include the laws and rules embedded in state, private sector, and civil society organizations at the local, national, and global levels, as well as international organizations. Informal institutions on the other include, for example, norms of inferior or superior status, expectations of bribes, networks of kin, friends, and neighbors, informal and social restrictions placed on women inheriting property, or the cluster of practices governing their behavior etc”(World Book: 2002, p. 12). Changing unequal institutional relations depends on improving the governance—changes in the laws, procedures, regulations, values, ethics, and incentives that guide the behavior of public officials and the private sector. This requires rules and laws and investment of public and private resources to strengthen the demand side of governance. These changes can create the conditions that enable poor women and men to exercise their agency. The social and cultural context is particularly important for empowerment approaches.

Since gender relations vary both geographically and over time they always need to be investigated in a context. It also follows that they are not immutable. Therefore both state reform and efforts to build women’s ‘assets’ and ‘capabilities’ must take forms that reflect local norms, values, and behaviors. The real challenge, therefore, is to identify key elements of empowerment that recur consistently across social, institutional, and political contexts and institutional design must then focus on incorporating these elements or principles of empowerment.

**Role of NGOs in the Process of Empowerment and Social Development: Literature Review**

In the last decade, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have gained increased attention among scholars and practitioners of development. They have become increasingly important agents of the development process in the countries of the South, in all of their main areas of work such as humanitarian relief, long-term development, policy formation and political advocacy (Attack 1999). On the other hand, there is a current view that NGOs constitute a viable alternative to government as channels of development assistance, particularly in developing countries. Some of the NGOs’
functions and advantages, according to Streeten (1997) are (1) they are good at reaching and mobilizing the poor and remote communities; (2) they help empower poor people to gain control of their lives, and they work with and strengthen local institutions; (3) they carry out projects at lower costs and more efficiently than the government agencies and (4) they promote sustainable development.

NGOs are professionally-staffed organizations aiming at contributing to the reduction of human suffering and to the development of poor countries (Streeten 1997). They do this in various ways, e.g. by funding projects, engaging in service provision and capacity building, contributing to awareness, and promoting the self-organization of various groups (Baccaro 2001). Meanwhile, Desai (2005) has mentioned that NGOs have an important role to play in supporting women, men and households, and expected that they can meet the welfare. She accounted some role and functions for NGOs, such as counseling and support service, awareness raising and advocacy, legal aid and microfinance. These services help the people to achieve their ability, skill and knowledge, and take control over their own lives and finally become empowered. On the other hand, Stromquist (2002) has noted three major functions for NGOs such as (1) service delivery (e.g. relief, welfare, basic skills); (2) educational provision (e.g. basic skills and often critical analysis of social environments); and (3) public policy advocacy. Baccaro (2001) shows how particular NGOs can promote the organization and “empowerment” of the poor, particularly poor women, through a combination of microcredit, awareness-raising, training for group members, and other social services. Empowerment is the ability of individuals to gain control socially, politically, economically and psychologically through (1) access to information, knowledge and skills; (2) decision making; and (3) individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control (Rappaport 1987; Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988).

In the long term, the aim of NGOs is to promote sustainable community development through activities that promote capacity building and self-reliance. Langran (2002), has mentioned that NGOs through capacity building help to sustain community development. NGOs are often created in order to expand the capacities of people (Korten 1990). Furthermore, NGOs are praised for promoting community self-reliance and empowerment through supporting community-based groups and relying on participatory
processes (Korten 1990; Clark 1991; Friedmann 1992; Fowler 1993; Edwards and Hulme 1994; Salamon 1994).

On the other hand, sustainable development has emerged over the past few decades as an important paradigm for community development. However, as Bradshaw and Winn (2000) have noted, sustainability is rooted largely in an environmental approach, particularly in the industrialized countries. But, the goal of sustainable development is to find a balance between three pillars - social, economic and environmental – of communities (Sneddon 2000). The Rio Conference interpreted sustainable development as a single process with three dimensions. In addition, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation defined it as three distinct processes, of “economic development, social development and environmental protection— as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” (United Nations 2002). These dimensions were originally introduced with the aim of identifying areas in which social, economic and environmental goals are interrelated (Holmberg and Sandbrook 1992). However, these dimensions of sustainable development have done little to reduce the complexity of the concept and has itself introduced a contradiction. Hibbard and Tang (2004) in their study in Vietnam, have noted the importance of NGOs’ roles in sustainable community development. One of the roles was that NGOs balance the social, economic and environmental factors in promoting sustainable development. Another important role of NGO that they discovered was decentralization of the central government which helps the local communities to acquire more power in order to make their own decisions. But, sometimes the local communities lack specialists to do professional work and resources that are important for the particular projects. Finally, they concluded that sustainable community development is process-oriented, and it requires extensive community participation and relies on network to share resources, knowledge and expertise.

From the literatures, it could be summarized that NGOs play an important function in promoting sustainable community development. Sustainable community development emphasizes on a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives, while simultaneously enhancing local social relationships. Sustainable communities meet the economic needs of their residents, enhance and protect the environment, and promote more humane local societies (Bridger and Luloff 1997). As
Bridger (1997) has mentioned, sustainable community development includes five dimensions. The first dimension emphasizes on increasing local economic diversity. The second is self-reliance which entails the development of local markets, local production, local processing of previously imported goods, and greater cooperation among local economic entities. The third dimension involves a reduction in the use of energy, coupled with the careful management and recycling of waste products. The fourth dimension focuses on the protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources. Finally, the fifth dimension is related to the commitment of the sustainable communities to social justice. Through the functions of providing microfinance, initiating capacity building and self-reliance, NGOs could promote empowerment among community members, and eventually community sustainable development. The figure given below shows the outline of the relationship between NGOs’ functions, empowerment and community development. From this perspective, NGOs’ functions in community development are, among others, develop the local production and local markets; help the community to develop the social, capital and human resources; increase the knowledge and skills; encourage people to participate in activities, and act as a network between community and systems. The involvement in these activities would lead to them become empowered, which is the output of community development. In the long run, the outcome would be sustainable community development.

**Theoretical framework of the functions of NGOs in promoting community development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO’s Functions</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Community Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro Finance</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity Building</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Reliance</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→

→
This model specifically discussed the functions of NGOs relating to provision of microfinance, initiation of community capacity building and self reliance. Eventually, sustainable community development will be achieved, particularly when community is empowered. The “bottom-up approach” in community development would likely bring about empowerment to the community and finally sustainable community development. According to Finger (1994), the bottom-up approach emphasizes community participation, grassroots movements and local decision making. It argues that community participation and grassroots initiatives promote participatory decision making and local self-reliance (Panda 2007). In bottom-up approach, people are able to define their own problems and having ability and capacity to solve it through organizing and participating themselves.

*Microfinance and Sustainable Community Development*

During the 1990s, scholars have increasingly referred to microfinance as an effective means of poverty reduction (Rekha 1995; Cerven and Ghazanfar 1999; Pankhurst and Johnston 1999). Oxaal and Baden (1997). Mayoux (2000) and Cheston and Khan (2002) have pointed out the importance of microfinance in empowerment, particularly women empowerment. Microfinance is defined as efforts to improve the access to loans and to saving services for poor people (Shreiner 2001). It is currently being promoted as a key development strategy for promoting poverty eradication and economic empowerment. It has the potential to effectively address material poverty, the physical deprivation of goods and services and the income to attain them by granting financial services to households who are not supported by the formal banking sector (Sheraton 2004). Microcredit programs provide small loans and savings opportunities to those who have traditionally been excluded from commercial financial services. As a development inclusion strategy, microfinance programs emphasize women’s economic contribution as a way to increase overall financial efficiency within national economies.

According to Cheston and Khan (2002), one of the most popular forms of economic empowerment for women is microfinance, which provides credit for poor women who are usually excluded from formal credit institutions. Since the 1990s,
microfinance institutions have addressed the issues of sustainability, participation and empowerment. These issues have been researched and debated by donor agencies, NGOs, feminists, and activists (Johnson and Rogaly 1997; Razavi 1997; Kabeer 1999; Mayoux 2001; Mahmud 2003). However, underneath these shared concerns lie three fundamentally different approaches to microfinance: financial sustainability, feminist empowerment, and poverty alleviation. All three microfinance approaches have different goals coupled with varied perspectives on how to incorporate gender into microfinance policy and programs (Mayoux 2000). The microfinance empowers women by putting capital in their hands and allowing them to earn an independent income and contribute financially to their households and communities. This economic empowerment is expected to generate increased self-esteem, respect, and other forms of empowerment for women beneficiaries.

Some evidence show that microfinance would empower women in some domains such as increased participation in decision making, more equitable status of women in the family and community, increased political power and rights, and increased self-esteem (Cheston and Kuhn 2002). Well-being as an output of microfinance not only covers the economic indicators, but also other indicators such as community education, environment, recreation and accessibility to social services. It is related to the quality of life (Asnarulkhadi 2002). In order to gain economic sustainability, NGOs through microfinance help the communities to reduce poverty, create jobs, and promote income generation. In the developing countries like India, sustainability is linked more closely to issues of poverty and the gross inequalities of power and resources (Hamnett and Hassan 2003). This is due to the fact that in the Third World countries, the ecological system sometimes conflicts with the socio-economic needs of local people who depend on a local ecosystem for their survival (Nygren 2000). In contrast, in the developed countries, as Bradshaw and Winn (2000) have noted, more priority is given on environmental aspect of sustainable development. In these countries, since the wealth of the nation and of most individuals has reached a certain level, therefore sustainability has been fueled primarily by concern for such issues as climate change, biodiversity, the deprivation of the natural environment, and the over-consumption of natural resources -especially non-renewable (Hibbard and Chuntang 2004).
Capacity building is another NGO’s strategy that helps to bring about sustainable community development. Capacity building is an approach to development that builds independence. It can be:

a) A ‘means to an end’, where the purpose is for others to take on programs.

b) An ‘end’ in itself, where the intent is to enable others, from individuals through to government departments, to have greater capacity to work together to solve problems.

c) A process, where capacity building strategies are routinely incorporated as an important element of effective practice (NSW Health 2001).

Before beginning to build capacity within programs, practitioners need to identify pre-existing capacities such as skills, structures, partnerships and resources. Frankish (2003) has counted a number of dimensions for community capacity including financial capacity (resources, opportunities and knowledge), human resources (skills, motivations, confidence, and relational abilities and trust) and social resources (networks, participation structures, shared trust and bonding). UNDP (1997) has introduced capacity building as the process by which individuals, groups, and organizations increase their abilities to (1) perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and (2) understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, in terms of NGOs’ functions, Langran (2002) has defined capacity building as the ability of one group (NGOs) to strengthen the development abilities of another group (local communities) through education, skill training and organizational support.

Capacity building is an approach to development not a set of pre-determined activities. There is no single way to build capacity. Although experience tells us that there is a need to work across the key action areas, practitioners approach each situation separately to identify pre-existing capacities and develop strategies particular to a program or organization, in its time and place. NGOs, through the provision of education, skill and knowledge, develop the capacity of community towards achieving sustainable
development. In fact, NGOs act as a capacity builder to help the community to develop the resources, building awareness, motivating to participation in project and finally improving the quality of community’s lives. A link to empowerment is frequently cited as one of the reasons for and outcomes of community capacity building. Empowerment is discussed at the level of individual empowerment (changes in skills, knowledge, consciousness and awareness, hope, action and beliefs in abilities to affect change) and changes in wider social structures and processes that result in increased resources and opportunities (Verity 2007). Furthermore, with regards to sustainability, capacity building has been identified in much sustainable development policy as one of the key strategies for increasing the potential towards sustainable development. For example, in a program to train women to establish a small enterprise, a positive result will be that women have co-operated to start the enterprise, but a sustainable outcome will depend on whether women have the capacity to make it work and derive an income from it without external financial or technical assistance (Viswanath 1991). Many researchers argue that building community capacities and fostering empowerment are more effective ways of achieving sustainable community development than programs and success indicators imposed by outside experts (Harrison 1998; Mobbs 1998). They point out that outside experts usually have limited knowledge and understanding of the particular context, needs and issues of a community. Local solutions to achieving sustainable community and economic development are therefore seen as important outcomes of a capacity-building approach (Lennie 2005). For example, to increase the people’s participation in order to achieve sustainable development, many issues should be considered, such as skills, leadership, knowledge, physical resources and stakeholder representativeness.

**Self-reliance and Sustainable Community Development**

Self-reliance is another strategy that affects sustainable community development. Effective community development sits on the foundation of self-reliance. The concept of self-reliance is strategically situated within the essence of community development and is related to other concepts like mutual-help, self-help, participation of the indigenous people and rural progress. Self reliance encourages the necessity for people to use local initiatives, their abilities and their own possessions to improve their condition. Fonchingong and Fonjong (2002) have pointed out that self-reliance is increasingly being
adopted as modus operandi for community development. According to Kelly (1992), self-reliance means that the people rely on their own resources and are independent of funds sourced outside the community. Self-reliant strategy relies on the willingness and ability of the local people to depend on their own available resources and technology which they can control and manage.

A self-reliant strategy requires the optional use of all available human, natural and technological resources (Agere 1982). Although dependence on the state maybe desirable in the short term, it should not be a long term objective, because the aim of the community development must ultimately be self-reliance. Reliance on external resources will lead to the loss of autonomy and independence of the community. On the other hand, autonomous communities can flourish only in the absence of such external dependency. Therefore, to attain self-reliance, community workers (e.g. NGOs) and community groups must discover their own potential and look for ways to innovatively develop such discovered potential to use as sources of wealth for the development of the community (Ife and Tesoriero 2006). Motivating and mobilizing people to be self reliant and to participate in development activities become an important objective of the NGOs. According to Korten (1990), the second strategy of the NGOs focuses on developing the capacities of the people to better meet their own needs through self-reliant local action. In the second generation strategy, Korten (1990), mentioned that the local inertia is the heart of problem in a village or community. There is a potential energy in a community but remains inactive because of the inertia of tradition, isolation and lack of education. But this inertia can be broken through the intervention of an outside change agent (NGOs and other agents) who helps the community realize its potentials through education, organization, consciousness raising, small loans and the introduction of simple new technologies. It is the stress on local self-reliance, with the intent that benefits will be sustained by community self-help action beyond the period of NGO assistance (Korten 1990). Therefore, NGOs, through the strategy of self-reliance, can facilitate sustainable development of the community.

According to this model, NGOs attempts in achieving community development through micro-finance, capacity building and self-reliance. NGOs through the micro finance help members of community to access jobs, income-generation and improve
economic situation. And then they would become empowered economically. On the other hand, NGOs develop the capacities of community such as skills, abilities, knowledge, assets and motivates the community to participate in the project to improve the quality of their lives. NGOs act as capacity builders that help the community to achieve the empowerment particularly individual empowerment. NGOs assist the community to discover their potentials and also mobilize community to be self-reliant. According to the definition, empowerment is where people have greater control over livelihood resources. Therefore, the final outcome of community development is the independence of the community from external agents in formulating its agenda and managing its affairs. This process involves capacity building, where people get involved in human capital training, transferring of authority from donor to recipient and receive supports from stakeholders (World Bank group 1999). When people become fully empowered, they are able to contribute toward sustainable development (Lyons et al. 2001). Capacity building and empowerment are the best means to achieve sustainable community development. Therefore, NGOs through some programs and functions, such as microfinance, capacity building and self-reliance help community to be empowered, and finally contribute towards sustainable community development.

**Research Problem and its Relevance of to India**

India has a long history and tradition of voluntary action, providing services to the sick, needy and destitute. Rather, it is a part of our cultural heritage and way of life. Voluntarism in India is as old as the emergence of organized society itself. It originated as pure philanthropy of charity and this motivation sustained the voluntary efforts all through history in the ancient and medieval period. The voluntary efforts in the process of welfare and development have undergone evolutionary changes with changing emphasis on various experimental development programmes in India. The history of voluntary action is an integral part of the study of evolution and changes in the Indian society.

Voluntarism in India has gained momentum with the advancement of society. The growth of voluntary organizations over the past four decades has given them an
increasingly important role and led them to form a distinctive sector within civil society. They have emerged as a viable institutional framework and a well defined ‘third sector’- next to government sectors and private enterprises, to serve as a catalyst for development and change.

Given the fact that

① In the quest for an alternative development model that is humanizing, equitable, environmentally sustainable, a people centered development with greater people’s participation has been recognized as a new development paradigm today.

② The Non-government organizations with their participatory approach, people’s mobilizing capacity, closeness to grass roots and better insights into the needs of the people have emerged as alternative institutional framework to serve as catalyst for development and change and over a period of time has been evolved as a viable ‘third sector, in the third world next to government sector and the private enterprises.

③ The voluntary sector has been integrated in the planning and development process in India especially after launching of planned development in the country in 1950 by creating an enabling environment for the growth of social entrepreneurship.

④ It has been recognized that democracy at the grass roots can not be strengthened without a tradition of public service and spirit and spirit of voluntarism as the voluntary organizations promote of culture of cooperation among the people and between the people and the government and therefore the government has laid and emphasis to create replicate models of NGO-led development and NGO-delivered services that do not depend on governmental intervention for growth.

⑤ Given the close interface between the government and the voluntary sector, it has been urged at various forums to have a continuous review of the role and
contribution of NGOs to further strengthen this interface as well as to create an enabling environment for NGO-led development process in the country.

The proposed study seeks to assess the role and contribution of selected non-governmental organizations working in the field of upliftment and empowerment of women in Meerut Mandal of Uttar Pradesh during post-independent period. For the purpose of research, two aspects – ‘role and contribution of selected NGOs in specific geographical region’ and ‘empowerment of women’ are addressed. The term ‘empowerment’ connotes different meanings but the study proposes to define the term ‘empowerment’ in its broadest sense, that is as the process of enlarging the freedom of choice and action for women meaning thereby increasing one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life. The study proposes to develop an understanding whether involvement of NGOs have really been useful in upliftment of the status of women and also in empowering them by enlarging their freedom of choice and action meaning thereby increasing their authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect their life.

**Historical Perspective of Position of Women in Indian society**

There can be little doubt that women occupied a high place in social life of the Early Aryans. The milder and more beneficent forces of nature were addressed as female deities and invoked with prayers.

**The Age of the Rig Veda** (2500 to 1500 BC) makes the frequent reference to unmarried girls speaks in favor of a custom of girls marrying long after they had reached puberty. There seems to have been considerable freedom on the part of young persons in the selection of their life partners as they generally married at a mature age. Approval of the parent or the brother was not essential, the boy and the girl made up their minds and then informed the elders though their participation in the marriage ceremony was essential i.e. the blessings of the elders were sought. A hymn in the RV gives us an idea of the old marriage ritual. The boy and his party went to the girl’s house where a well-dressed girl was ready. The boy catches the hand of the girl and leads her round the fire. These two acts constitute the essence of marriage. The boy takes the girl home in a
procession followed by consummation of the marriage. The wife was respected in her new house and wielded authority over her husband’s family. The wife participated in the sacrificial offerings of her husband. Abundance of sons was prayed for so, naturally so in a patriarchal society since the son performed the last rites and continued the line. There is little evidence to show that the custom of Sati existed. Even if known, it was limited to the Kshatriya class. Remarriage of widows was permitted under certain conditions. Female morality maintained a high standard although the same degree of fidelity was not expected from the husband. They took an active part in agriculture, manufacture of bows. They moved around freely, publicly attended feasts and dances. The women thus enjoyed much freedom during this period.

In the age of the Atharva, Sama and Yajur Vedas (1500 to 600 BC) freedom of marriage continued and remarriage of widows continued to be allowed. The sale of a daughter was known but viewed with extreme disfavor. Dowries continued to be given but not in the sense that we understand today. The marriage ceremony was the same as in the previous period except that the girl had to mount a stone before the boy caught her hand. As in the previous period the picture of an ideal family life continued. Gradually religious ceremonies increasingly were conducted by the priests resulting in loosing her preeminent position in the household. This was the period during which the importance of rituals increased and so did the importance of the Brahmans. Desire for sons continued, sati was not prevalent. The position of women was not as high as it was in the Rig Vedic period. Female workers were involved in dying, embroidery and basket making.

In the Age of the Upanishads - the Grihya-sutras give detailed rules regarding the proper seasons for marriage, qualifications of bride and bridegroom. The various stages of a marriage ceremony are:

a) The wooers formally go to the girl’s house.

b) When the bride’s father gives his formal consent, the bridegroom performs a sacrifice.

c) Early in the morning of the first day of marriage celebrations, the bride is bathed.

d) A sacrifice is offered by the high priests of the bride’s family and a dance of 4/8 women takes place as part of the Indrani karman.
e) The bridegroom goes to the girl’s house and makes the gift of a garment, mirror to the bride who has been bathed earlier.
f) The Kanya-pradana, formal giving away of the bride takes place now followed by.
g) The clasping of the bride’s right hand by the bridegroom’s own right hand takes place now.
h) The treading on stone.
i) The leading of the bride round the fire by the bridegroom.
j) The sacrifice of the fried grains.
k) The Saptapadi i.e. the couple walking seven steps together as a symbol of their livelong concord.
l) Finally, the bride is taken to her new house.
m) After the bride came home, the couple is expected to observe celibacy for three days after which the marriage was consummated. The logic was to emphasize at the outset that self-control was very much part of married life.

The bride is at a mature age, over 15 or 16. The elaborate rites indicate that marriage was a holy bond and not a contract. The women held an honored position in the household. She was allowed to sing, dance and enjoy life. Sati was not generally prevalent. Widow remarriage was allowed under certain circumstances. On the whole the Dharma-sutras take a more lenient attitude than the Smritis of a later age. The Apastamba imposes several penalties on a husband who unjustly forsakes his wife. On the other hand, a wife who forsakes her husband has to only perform penance. In case a grown up girl was not married at a proper time by her father, she could choose her husband after three years of waiting.

The most pleasing feature of this period is the presence of women teachers, many of whom possessed highest spiritual knowledge. The famous dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi and Gargi Vachaknavi show how enlightened the women of that age were. According to the Sarvanukramanika, there were as many as 20 women among the authors of the Rig Veda. These stories stand in contrast to the later age when the study of Vedic literature was forbidden to women under the most severe penalty.
As in all patriarchal societies during that age the birth of a daughter was unwelcome. The son lived with his parents, earned money for the family, protected the family from enemies and perpetuated the name of the family. However, the latter’s birth was not considered so bad. One of Upanishads recommends a ritual for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter. Although it did not become as popular as the one for the birth of a son, it indicates those cultured parents eager for daughters. During this period the daughters could be initiated into Vedic studies and could offer sacrifices to Gods, the son was absolutely not necessary. The importance of ancestor worship by sons led to a decline in the importance of daughters. The feeling of dejection on the birth of a daughter did not lead to Female Infanticide in ancient India. This custom crept into India during the medieval period. Once the disappointment on the birth of a daughter was over, the family did not distinguish between their son and daughter. The professions open to woman in higher sections of society were teaching, medical doctors and business. They suffered from no disabilities in doing business and could even pledge their husband’s credit and enter into contracts on their behalf.

‘Man is only one half” says a Vedic passage, he is not complete till he is united with his wife and gives birth to children. The husband is to treat his wife as his dearest friend. The wife is a companion friend of a man, says a Vedic passage. The Mahabharat and Buddhist thinkers concur with this view.

In the post Vedic period (600 BC to 320 AD) marriage between the same caste was preferred although inter caste marriages were prevalent. Of the eight forms of marriage prescribed by the Dharma-sutras, the Arhsa form of marriage was most popular according to which father gave his daughter after receiving from the bridegroom a cow and a bull or two pairs. The girl’s father or guardian selected the bridegroom. According to Nearchus, the Indians “marry without giving or taking dowries but the girls, as soon as they are marriageable, are brought forward by their fathers and exposed in public, to be selected by a person who excels in some form of physical exercise”. This indicates a modified form of Svayamvara.

While girls continued to be married around 16, there was a tendency to marry them before they attained puberty. It was probably due to the anxiety to maintain their body purity. Lowering of the marriage age affected their education and culture adversely.
Extreme emphasis was now laid on the physical chastity of women, which discouraged widow remarriage, divorce, and encouragement of sati. During this period, we should remember that India faced its first foreign invasion from Greeks. During the earlier part of this period, there were highly educated women holding an honorable position in society and household. Women also received training in arts, music, painting and for some military training also. Female bodyguards are referred to in Kautilya’s Arthasastra. Buddhist and Jain nuns renounced the world for the sake of spiritual salvation. Jain texts refer to Jayanti who carried on discussions with Mahavira himself and later on became a nun.

In spite of the progress, there were growing disabilities. Earlier the girls went through the Upanayana ceremony but now it was only a formality. Manu laid down that marriage was equal to Upanayana while Yajnavalkya took the step of prohibiting Upanayana ceremony for girls. The wife who performed Vedic sacrifices was denied the right to do so. Greek writers have stated that sati existed, possibly confined to the warrior class in Punjab only. As social customs are determined by the environment in which we live in, according to K.M. Munshi “About the beginning of the Christian era, perhaps under the influence of foreigners, the spiritual disenfranchisement of women began. Rituals came to be performed without the Vedic mantras, the Vedic sacrifices were tabooed for the wife. Widow remarriage and divorce were discouraged. On the other hand, Kautilya, in the matters of divorce, placed man and women on an equal footing. But as people with lax morals came into the social framework on account of the expanding frontiers of Dharma, the marital tie assumed greater sanctity”.

During the period (320 to 750 A.D), there was a growing tendency to lower the marriageable age of girls with girls being married before or after puberty. Marriage within the same caste was preferred but prohibited within certain degrees of relationship. A young man could under special circumstances apply himself to winning the girl of his choice by courtship and wooing when successful was to be followed by a gradual winning of the girl’s confidence.

Girls of high families had adequate opportunities for acquiring proficiency in higher learning. In Vatsyayana’s Kamasutra, instances of princess are mentioned whose intellect was sharpened by knowledge of the Sasatras. The literary evidence of the Gupta
age proves that girls of high families as also those living in hermitages read works on ancient history & legend. Girls living in royal courts were trained in singing & dancing too. Vatsyananana draws a picture of a good wife, which may be taken as a reflection of the real life during that period. When a woman is the only wife she has to devote herself to him as if he were a deity. She must be fully devoted, take care of his comforts and attend festivities with his permission. She honor’s her husband’s friends and looks after his parents. Apart from looking after his friends & family, she has complete charge of the household. In case she has a co-wife she looks upon her as her younger sister or mother depending on her own age.

The Gupta period characterized with the chaste and austere life prescribed by the Smritis. Sati was extolled by some but strongly disapproved by others. In the absence of any reference by the Chinese travelers it would be correct to believe that the custom was not widely prevalent during this period. Remarriage of widows though coming into disfavor was not forbidden.

The General Status of Women deteriorated due to a lowering of the age of marriage, as girls were not educated as before. This reduced the position and status of women. Brides being too young had no say in choosing their partners. Love marriages were a thing of the past. During this period, marriage became an irrevocable union, but it was one sided in favor of the husband. Since women were not as educated as before they did not know what their rights were. Among the most striking changes may be the increased recognition in Katyayana of the women’s right to property and a remarkable rule in Atri that allowed women molested by robbers to regain her social status. Some women enjoyed political power e.g. Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Chandragupta II who ruled the Vakataka kingdom on behalf of her son, in the 4th century A.D.

The specific reasons for deterioration in the status of women between 500 BC to 500 AD may be briefly summarized as below:

- Due to the **introduction of slavery** the position of women in the classical period of Greek history deteriorated significantly and they lost esteem in society. Over time and due to various factors, inter caste marriages became prevalent during the period 1000 to 500 BC. The introduction of non-Aryan women into the Aryan household is the starting point to the deterioration in a women’s status. Unfamiliar with religious
customs, rituals and Sanskrit the non-Aryan wife would have goofed making the priests angry. In love with his wife, the Aryan man overlooked the shortcomings in his wife. However, the immediate impact of this factor was that the whole class of woman was prescribed as ineligible for Vedic studies and religious duties.

Another reason was that **Vedic sacrifices became complex** making it difficult for the wife to have mastery over them. In the Vedic age, a young woman would take a Soma stalk and proceed straight to offer it to Indra in a sacrifice performed by her alone. In the Vedic age, she got married at about 16-17 by which she could devote 6-7 yrs to study but to know all the rituals etc she would have to marry around 22-24 i.e. about 12 yrs of study. This was impractical at that point of time. This plus an increase in the desire for a son led to a lowering of the marriage age of girls, which in turn discouraged their education. Although, the view that women must not be allowed to perform sacrifices was opposed by parts of society, but its vigorous advocacy by one school coupled with a lowering of the marriage age led to the neglect of the Vedic education of girls.

The period of 500 years between **200 BC to 300 AD was very dark for Northern India**. First came the Greeks ( 190 to 150 BC ), Scythians and Parthians ( 100 BC to 50 AD). The Kushanas followed these barbarians in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century AD. Political reverses, war reverses and the decline of prosperity produced a wave of despondency all around. The ascetic ideal of the Upanishads, Buddhism and Jainism which was opposed by Hindu society earlier began to get a real hold over social mind owing to the prevailing wave of despondency at the beginning of the Christian era. It strengthened the hands of those who were opposed to widow remarriage. A women was to lead a chaste life, to aim for salvation, follow the footsteps of thousands of monks, nuns who had entered the Sanyasa stage direct from Brahmacharya without passing through married life.

**Sati** – due to the foreign invasions and its consequences for women, the custom of sati, though confined to the warrior class earlier began to gain widespread acceptance, be perceived as a great sacrifice. The tendency to regard women as weaker and not of strong moral fibre got stronger during this period although women as mother, sister continued to be highly respected.
The only direction in which the position of women improved was in the sphere of proprietary rights. As society began to discourage widow remarriages, there began to arise a class of childless widows who needed money to maintain them.

History is witness that conquest of a country implies conquest of its womenfolk. The wars that preceded the Greek invasion did not result in conquest of women. Invasions resulted in great emphasis being placed on the purity and chastity of women. Naturally, it impacted the way society perceived women.

Notwithstanding the remarkable changes in the position of women in free India, there is still a great divergence between the constitutional position and stark reality of deprivation and degradation. Whatever whiff of emancipation has blown in Indian society, has been inhaled and enjoyed by the urban women, their population belonging to the rural areas are still totally untouched by the wind of changes. They still have been living in miserable conditions, steeped in poverty, ignorance, superstition and slavery. There still exists a wide gulf between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislations, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality on the status of women in India, on the other. The human rights scenario in the country continues to be dismal and depressing. Women are being brutalized, commodified, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination. Although, gender discrimination has been banned by the Constitution and women have been guaranteed political equality with men, yet there is a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Even after half a century of independence, barring a few exceptions, women have mostly remained outside the domain of power and political authority. Although they constitute about half of the citizen and over the years their participation by way of voting has increased, yet their participation and representation in law making and law implementing bodies are not very satisfactory.

No doubt the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts have provided access to women in the decision making process at the grass-root level but their representation in the Parliament and state legislatures is woefully poor. Insecurity does not allow the women leaders to identify leadership at the grass-root level. In politics when a man proposes, they themselves depose. In reality women representatives are ornamental in
nature and political consciousness is found lacking among them. They are affected by the caste and class divisions, feudal attitudes, patriarchal nature of the family and village-social, environmental, ethnic, religious separatism and the like. They are members on record only. Allegedly, they are not consulted while taking decision. Thus, women representatives are not free from male dominance in the village administration and no significant change in the power equal is observed in the villages. In these days of scam-ridden politics, the increasing role of money and mafia in elections keeps most of the women away from politics. The factors responsible for this position may various and varied, however a few basic issues deserve specific mention include the following:

- Lack of awareness
- Lack of social and economic empowerment
- Lack of political will
- Feebleness of accountability mechanisms
- Lack of enforcement by the police force
- Lack of gender culture

Of course, there is some awareness among women due to reservation for them in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). But there is need for appropriate training and education relating to different aspects in functioning of Panchayats to make women members conscious enough about their effective role and representation in the Panchayat Samiti. Women will have to empower themselves from below in order to compel the government to empower them from above. Further, there is a need for a change of values and behavior in the society, a need for positive socio-cultural and economic empowerment and above all the will power and strong determination of women to join politics. Education can play a vital role in bringing about the desirable behavioral changes among the women and make them well equipped in terms of knowledge, competence and capacity to deal with different political problems.

It may be concluded that women have shifted traditional assumptions about their roles and capabilities. There has been a marked change, and it has been for the better. Many of its benefits however have yet to touch the majority and all of us continue to experience various forms of gender discrimination. If laws designed to address the concerns of women are to have a dramatic and positive impact on women’s lives, they
must be sensitive to the social, economic and political disempowerment of women throughout the world. The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable woman to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns.

Outline of the Study

Given the position of the women in Indian society and the rise and significance of the NGOs as the ‘third sector’ and partner in the development of the society, the following research questions are asked to address the problem raised in this study:

1. What roles are played by NGOs for addressing the issue of women empowerment in India?

2. What is the interface between the Government and NGOs in general and in respect to empowering women in particular?

3. Are the target groups in the study found an outlet to address their problems for NGO programmes?

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses in addressing the social sector problems such as selected in the study on behalf of NGOs?

For the purpose of this study, ‘non-governmental organizations’ refer to those non-profit, voluntary organizations that carry a broad range of social development functions with and on behalf of people. As vast majority of these organizations exit outside government, therefore, it is assumed that their programs emanate from the expressed needs of people rather than from the governments.

Methodology for the study

The proposed study will be descriptive cum analytical in nature and will be conducted empirically. The research methodology to be evolved for the study is described as below:
Selection of NGOs: For the purpose of this study, selection of NGOs will be based on the volume of activities, coverage and their existence in the study areas.

Selection of study Area: Based on the activities and coverage of selected NGOs, the number of geographical region (cities, villages, etc.) will be identified using appropriate sampling method.

Primary Information: Primary Information will be collected from the beneficiaries, non-governmental employees and private sector people working in the study area. The primary data will be collected at various intervals by different methods and tools such as reconnaissance survey, household survey, interviews, group discussion and participatory/appraisal exercise. A structured questionnaire will be prepared for the purpose of interviews with beneficiaries will be as other selected persons.

Secondary Information: Apart from primary information, secondary information from published and unpublished sourced will also be used to substantiate the results emanating from the primary data.

Analysis of data: After collecting primary and secondary information, data will be analyzed by using appropriate statistical techniques besides presenting it in the form of tables, graphs, pie charts etc.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

There is growing concern among the intellectual community, government and donor agencies as well as beneficiaries on the role of the NGOs in development aid transfer, socio-economic improvement of the country and the effective service delivery to the target groups. This study would understanding how the NGOs could be useful in the process of empowering women in India. This study might also contribute to the academic assessment of NGOs works, which could provide valuable insights to overcome the shortcomings and bottlenecks for help local and national government policy makers, donor agencies in implementing the NGO-led development activities in directing their recourse in good projects more efficiently and implementing them for creating a welfare society.
Though this study is proposed to be conducted in a scientific way, the findings and conclusions cannot be generalized in macro or broader perspective as the coverage of study is supposed to limited to few selected NGOs in the specified regions focusing only on the issue of empowerment of women. The other areas in which NGOs are engaged are equally important for the human and social development but scope of the study is limited to the upliftment and empowerment of women only.

Structure of the Study

The outline of the study is proposed to be as follows:

- The **First Chapter** would cover background, literature review, research problem, objectives and methodology and scope and limitation of the study.

- The **Second Chapter** would present the rise of voluntarism in India in its historical perspective focusing mainly the present policies of the government relating to the NGOs and other voluntary organizations including the institutional and legal framework within with which NGOs are working in India.

- The **Third Chapter** elaborates the government policy on the women’s empowerment and the role and contribution of the NGOs envisaged by the Government in the policies and programmes concerning empowerment of women in India. This Chapter will also present an assessment of the government programmes in the context of present position of women in Indian society.

- The **Fourth Chapter** will cover the details of NGOs to be selected in study encompassing their structure, mandate and function, style of function coverage of area in historical perspective since their inception. This chapter will also provide a sketch of the geographical areas selected in the study including their location, physical, and social infrastructural facilities and demographic and economic features etc. mainly to understand the existing status of our target groups.

- The **Fifth Chapter** will present the data collected from the primary and secondary sources both in descriptive and an analytical ways.
The **Sixth Chapter** will present the major inferences drawn from the study along with its implications for the local NGOs and the beneficiaries. The study would specifically drawn the inference to what extent these results could be generalized.

The **Seventh Chapter** will present the conclusion and recommendations especially with regard to implementing the policies and programmes in social sectors through NGOs, problems, NGOs encountering in performing their functions. This Chapter will also indicate the new areas of research in the field keeping in view its scope and limitations.

**REFERENCES**


54. March, Kathryn S. and Rachelle Taquete (1992), Women’s Informal Associations and the Organizational Capacity for Development; Monograph Series, Cornell University.


59. Oxaal, Zoe and Sally Baden (1997) Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy, Briefing prepared for Swedish


74. Sheraton M 2004. *An Analysis of The Effectiveness of Microfinance: A Case Study in the Western Cape*.


(Kate Young 1988); in *Gender and Development: A Relational Approach* Oxford University Press).

