CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In India, as in many other countries of the world, there is a vast difference between the idealised concept of women and the real life situation in which women find themselves. In both the industrially advanced and less advanced countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of the many social, cultural and economic discriminatory practices and many a time women are taken for granted as though they were part of the immutable scheme of things established by nature. Today women in the Indian society have a degraded status because of the prevalence of multiple factors such as illiteracy, exploitation, unemployment, female infanticide, child marriage, sati, dowry, prostitution, rape, widowhood, devadasi system, wife beating and purdah system, all of which have prevented the Indian women from attaining greater heights. It must be remembered that women's status is not just a matter of cultural and social history of traditions but it is basically rooted in the political and economic structure of our society which needs to be changed.

Women are denied the right to own or inherit property and they become dependent on men, which renders them vulnerable to exploitation. Although the women contribute through their labour in maintaining the household, it is almost never recognised as productive labour. Women's
contribution to the economy goes unregistered while the contribution of the males gets listed. Also when a society is structured patriarially control of property vests totally with the male, and these patterns further lower the status of women in the Indian society and leads to their being oppressed.

Rural women in our country suffer the dual ills of being economically as well as socially invisible. Economic invisibility stems from the perception that women are not relevant to the wage and market economy and social invisibility is a result of the general status of second class citizenship accorded to women.

A woman's biological and social reality has created several distinct roles for her in society, that of wife, mother, daughter, homemaker, worker, citizen etc. These multiple roles of women make several diverse demands on her time and energy. The social system in our country recognizes the roles of wife, mother and homemaker as paramount. A majority of women especially those living in rural areas do not have a distinct identity and personality to call their own even in this day and age. This discrimination and oppression of Indian women is perpetuated in spite of the spread of education among women and their growing participation in social, economical and political life of the country.

Women participate in development everywhere. But they are not equal participants because very frequently their status prevents them from having equal access to education, training, jobs, land ownership, credit,
business opportunities and even to nutritious food and other necessities for survival (Tom Gabriel, 1991).

This unfortunate state of affairs is also seen in the state of Kerala, which claims a higher literacy rate and a better health care system as compared to other states. Also though the sex ratio of 1040 females for every 1000 males is favourable to women in Kerala when compared to other states, unfortunately the same cannot be said for their status in real life. This situation if allowed to perpetuate could not only severely restrict the development and contribution of the Indian woman but would also adversely affect the growth and progress of the nation as a whole. Therefore in order to pave the way for a healthier and more progressive future of the nation it is imperative to help women rise from their shackles and to empower them so that they may be able to constructively and significantly contribute to society.

Empowerment of Women

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action.

According to Pillai (1995) empowerment is an active multidimensional process, which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
The process of empowerment is both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups that people must often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organise to take action and bring about change. The process of empowerment involves not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also equal participation in decision-making process, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains (Sushama Sahay, 1998).

Longwe's (1990) classification of the five levels of empowerment, namely, welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control, and the need to move from the level of welfare to control is a useful one.

When one talks of women's development and women's status, it is important to recognize that interventions at all levels namely, social, cultural, political and economic are required and are possible only if changes take place in the existing system and social structures, which are not at all favourable to the women today.

The process of women's empowerment begins in the mind, by changing women's consciousness. Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process, which enables women to realize their full identity and potential in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted nor can it be given away as alms. Power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components.
Women need to be empowered for gaining collective strength because when we are discussing the role of women, we are talking of changing the equilibrium of social forces to treat them as equal partners in the society and to bring recognition to all their roles.

Empowerment of women means many things according to Kamla Bhasin (1992):

- It means recognizing women’s contribution and women’s knowledge.
- It means helping women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.
- It means women enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity.
- It means women controlling their own bodies.
- It means women becoming economically independent and self-reliant.
- It means women controlling resources like land and property.
- It means reducing women’s burden of work, especially at home.
- It means creating and strengthening women’s group and organisation.
- It means promoting qualities of nurturing, caring, gentleness.

Women’s empowerment allows women to be appreciated and acknowledged for who they are and what they do. It is not particularly the ideology of feminism that empowers women, but rather their capacities to face bravely the individual and social facts of their actual situations (Lengermann and Wallace, 1985).
The female empowerment approach stresses the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance and internal strength. The empowerment approach to women's advancement in developing countries recognizes that the patriarchal structure of subordination must be addressed through women's organizations at the grass root level. Such local groups can facilitate bottom-up change by providing a social mechanism to raise women's consciousness about their subordination. Becoming aware of women's position in society, and transferring skills to enable women to gain access to education, employment, and health care are key components in many women empowerment programmes today.

The Need for Empowerment

In order to challenge their subordination, women must first recognize the ideology that legitimizes male domination and understand how it perpetuates their oppression. This recognition requires reversal of values and attitudes and indeed the world-view, which most women have internalized since earliest childhood.

Most poor women have never been allowed to think for themselves or to make their own choices except in unusual circumstances when a male decision-maker has been absent or has abdicated his role.

The demand for change does not usually begin spontaneously from the condition of subjugation. Rather, empowerment must be externally induced by forces working with an altered consciousness and an
awareness that the existing social order is unjust and unnatural. (Batliwala, 1995). One can attempt to change women’s consciousness by:

- altering their self-image and their beliefs about their rights and capabilities;
- creating an awareness of how gender discrimination, like other socio-economic and political factors, is one of the forces acting against them;
- challenging the sense of inferiority that has been imprinted on them since birth and recognising the true value of their labour and contribution to the family, society and economy.

Women must be convinced of their innate right to equality, dignity and justice. Armed with a new consciousness and growing collective strength, women begin to assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decisions within the family, community and village.

An empowerment process is one, which tackles both the condition and position of women, a process in which questions about the power structures and gender subordination within these are continually revised and explored. This empowerment process however may most effectively be instigated by means of implementing appropriate training programmes for the selected section of women.
Training

Training has emerged as a very important tool to influence the operational behaviour of millions of persons in the world in their respective vocations. The purpose of training is to achieve a change in the behaviour of those being trained. Training aims to increase interpersonal effectiveness, allowing individuals to work better with other people (Peter Warr et al., 1970).

The three main areas involved in training are skills, knowledge and attitudes. According to Samanta (1993) training is to help in narrowing down the gap between expected level of performance and actual levels of performance among the trainees. The study shows that training seeks to change individual behaviour. This change in behaviour occurs through a process and training is a means that brings out this change. Training is a formal procedure used by an organisation, government or voluntary, to facilitate the personnel’s effective functioning so that their resultant behaviour contributes to the attainment of the organisation’s goals and objectives.

Carolyn Nilson (1990) argues that training is one major approach to helping people control or manage change. This happens because training is designed to lead the trainee to master new knowledge, attitudes and skills. A person leaves training with the confidence that he can cope with change. It helps people to understand their attributes and enables them to develop their potentials for optimum utilisation in the field of work.
The general overall objective of the training for rural women is to equip them with the basic knowledge, attitudes and skills to play effective roles in promoting the process of development.

Training of women functionaries in rural development has become an important issue with special concern for women in development. In the implementation of development programmes special niches for women beneficiaries and women functionaries are increasingly being identified. This effort requires special emphasis in training of women functionaries to make them efficient delivery agents.

While the basic concepts of training viz., transfer of knowledge, skill, change of attitudes etc. would remain the same for any training, the identification of the training needs of women and monitoring and evaluating such training would require greater attention.

Training of women functionaries is not only more important but more difficult as it involves new areas and new efforts. The main task of women functionaries, revolves around helping women perceive their role in social and economic development and in motivating and encouraging them to participate in such development processes.

Many donors have identified education and training as critical in improving the status of women throughout the developing world. Training has to bring about definite changes in the trainees, like
promoting achievement, particularly in the area of knowledge, skills, attitude and practices.

A number of examples of training programmes, specifically for women functionaries, can be cited. In India we have the largest network of training programme for women functionaries in the Anganawadi Workers Training programme under the Integrated Child Development Services which has 3,16,416 Anganawadi workers, in 2597 projects and out of these 1,94,369 workers have been trained. This has consequently given rise to a great deal of experience.

Training can solve a variety of manpower problems by adding to their apperceptive backgrounds specific, identifiable items of additional knowledge, skills or understanding (Douglas Seymour, 1968). A training need exists when actual condition differs from a desired condition pertaining to human or ‘people’ aspect of organisational performance or, more specifically when a change in present human knowledge, skills or attitudes can bring about the desired performance.

Training is designed primarily to induce more effective behaviour and it may be directed towards the work situation, management processes, educational contexts or the community in general. Training must be viewed as an integral part of the activities of an organisation or community and not as a separate or autonomous process, even if it is delivered at a location that is physically or geographically removed from the line activities of the organisation.
In training the focus is on learning by an individual of the new ways of doing things. Training is structural and organised efforts through which an atmosphere of learning, sharing and synthesizing of information, knowledge and skills are transmitted to the trainees with the help of trainers (Samanta, 1993).

Training for Empowerment

Training is the component, which enables to learn how to behave differently. The entire process of empowerment is essentially about changing the way the powerless and the powerful behave. The skills required to bring about this change have to be acquired through training, learning to apply knowledge to effect changes in real life situations, and acquiring the skills needed to do so, is the essence of training for empowerment.

In the case of women, this is an even more important task, for simply raising awareness of the roots of their subordination is not enough. Women have to be trained to behave in certain ways in all their social relationships. Knowledge alone is not enough to enable them to behave differently or more assertively. Training must not only empower them to do so, but also impact tangible skills, which will support women in the process of change. Empowerment programmes have evolved an incredibly rich, powerful and varied set of training methods. The process and experience of empowerment must begin right from the training itself.
Training is not a one-time activity but an ongoing and continuous process where action-relation is a core ingredient. Training has to be built on the belief that women, irrespective of caste, class, age, literacy, and skills have the potential to think, be creative and change their situation. Training brings about a change in the self image of women, awareness of their inner strength, helps them in making valuable contributions to society, and enables them to take on new roles, and to develop the use of questioning and enhances their decision-making skills. Training for empowerment places great stress in the creation of an atmosphere of learning.

Education and training for women's empowerment contain five basic components to be comprehensive (Batliwala, 1994):

i) Creating critical consciousness,

ii) Access to new knowledge and information,

iii) Developing new skills,

iv) Collective organisational building and

v) Alternative educational opportunities especially for women and girls.

Thus training becomes a major component for change. It helps women to identify their skills and potentials.
Focus of the Study

The present study is an attempt to find out whether training helps in empowering the rural women. The sample population for the study was the members of grass root level women organisations (Mahila Samajams) who are economically and socially backward. The investigation was confined to members of Mahila Samajams working in the geographical region of Kerala and the following questions were posed to them. Does the training help in empowering the rural women? Does it enhance the level of awareness in women about women's rights and issues? How far has the training helped in enhancing the leadership qualities of women? Are they efficient in organising community for development? Are there any changes and differences in the social and economic status of women in the family and society when compared with untrained women? These are some of the questions that the researcher has chosen in investigating into the impact of training in empowering the rural women. Based on these the researcher has formulated the design of the study. In order to make it clearer an extensive review of literature has been done and is presented in the next chapter.