CHAPTER - I
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" One could judge the degree of civilization of a country by the social and political position of its women ".

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(French Idealist)

INTRODUCTION:

Gender differences exist and have existed in all human societies in some form or the other at different levels of socio-economic and cultural sphere of individual and social life. Gender is differentiated by sex. Such a difference is not only biological but socio-psychological in nature as well. Variations are also there among them at the levels of experience and reasoning for such a justification.

The term ‘Gender’ is defined as “the set of characteristics, roles and behaviour patterns that distinguish women from men, which are constructed not biologically but socially and culturally” (Sen 1999). According to Malane Makie (1983) Sex is the biologically dichotomy
between females and males. It is determined at conception and is, for the most part, unalterable. Gender, on the other hand, is what is socially recognized as femininity and masculinity. Thus, gender is clearly differentiated from sex in terms of its social-psychological dimensions.

Gender is an important factor in the allocation of roles, status and power to men and women in all societies. Gender role is a set of socially significant activities associated with men or women. The traditional family system in most societies confines women's role to the domestic sphere allocating them a subordinate authority and power compared to men. Men are conceived as the major resource providers and protectors of a family, while women are perceived as playing supportive roles to the men folk. Gender identification of any society justifies and legitimates male dominance over women through various social institutions such as caste, class, religion, marriage, politics etc.

Inequality and the resultant discrimination on the grounds of sex are commonly witnessed and justified in most societies. Gender division of labour is inevitably found in all pre-modern and modern societies, such as hunting and gathering, horticultural, agrarian and industrial societies.

Hunting and gathering societies being relatively small in size, the male members were more likely to hunt and female members were
supported to gather food. There were only minimal differences among the members except for differences in status between sexes.

In the later epoch of human civilization, say about twenty thousand years ago in the horticultural societies, there were more inequalities of gender division than in the hunting and gathering communities of the previous epoch. Wives were expected to obey their husbands and show respect at home and in the public. The horticultural society unfolds this fact. Husbands in these communities generally had the right to make out physical punishments to their wives. A woman’s father and brothers were expected to protect her interests against her husband’s atrocities and cruelty. A woman was considered a commodity and part of family wealth.

There was a decline in the nomadic way of life and beginning of settled communities in horticultural societies. Although division of labour became some-what more specialised here compared to hunting and gathering societies, status was derived through forms of wealth such as number of wives, animals and ornaments.

With the practice and innovations in technology, the agrarian or non-industrial civilisation arose. The societal progress brought with it a loss of status and power of women. Male domination and female subordination became part of the value system in these societies, as time
passed by. It was systematically carved into the social system through institutionalisation of norms.

Later in the industrial society, sex-differentiation gradually evolved into a manner that their societal roles were linked with production, governance and ecclesiastics which became more or less exclusive domains of the male sex. Concurrently, the biological capacity led the woman to roles which tied her in home and withdrew her from the wider economic, political and religious fields of social participation. Paralleling these processes, there took place progressive elaboration of an ideology, which rationalized this shift from differentiation and institutionalised it by means of customs and social-prescriptions.

Thus, sex differentiation gradually evolved itself in the form of male domination and female subordination. Documented experiences of women in different physical and social environment clearly indicate that women's status is subordinate to that of men everywhere. In every culture, sex role identity has been conceptualised in terms of masculinity and femininity. The cultural qualities that characterise female are feminine and those qualities that characterize male are called masculine, although societies differ in specific self-concepts and personality attributes to be masculine or feminine as defined by the patriarchal culture. Cultural and attitudinal qualities are associated with being male and female.
For instance, a cross-cultural study by Mead (1935) established that “culture is a major influence in determining differences between the sexes. Anthropologists agreed that woman and man could be explained in cultural forms than in terms of innate qualities”\(^2\). In a cultural set-up, children are taught how to become a man and a woman. A girl is taught to be ‘feminine’ where as a boy is taught to express ‘masculine’ aggression, toughness, courage, competence etc. Because of these cultural ethos women have secondary role to play in the society and family. As Beauvoir (1984) says “one is not born as a woman, it is enforced on her by social practices and cultural attitude of society”\(^3\). From the birth through her life, society forces her to be feminine and assigns a status and role.

It requires no great social insight to observe that women are discriminated in all most all the spheres of life. Women’s participation in all societies is limited and unequal when compared with men. Most of the different forms of discrimination against women have their roles in patriarchal system and its values. In a patriarchal society woman has to bear the humiliation of living at the mercy of male members. In such a family, there exists father or husband’s dominance. Domination got expressed in all relations of life in owning the property, controlling the wealth of their wives and making decisions in all family matters.
As mentioned before, customs traditions and social roles have discriminated women more severely than anything else in general. Frenier (1984) correctly points out “because of cultural ethos a large number of women oppose equal rights and privileges not only in underdeveloped societies but also in a developed country like America”. Such discriminations are typical all over the world in developing and underdeveloped countries. The discrimination tends to be more acute in the third world countries. In support of a study by Jones and Nelson (1981) has shown that women representation fares better in those states of United States of America which are highly developed. But equal status for men and women is found nowhere because of their position within the social structure; women are more restricted than men. Their entire identity is defined more by their familial roles than anything else.

It is clearly observed that women are marginalized largely through their concentration in certain kinds of work, in terms of career, progress and development. Honsot and Tyack (1981) portray a world that keeps women from advancing into position of power and prestige, women behave in self limiting way not because they are socialized as females but because they locked into low-power, low-visibility and dead-end jobs. Women are often invisible, absent or unseen on certain occasions in many societies. They always act as passive beings and assume men as the principle actors.
The gender role differentiation is due to cultural practices and socialization pattern of society. As Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) say “Every where we find that women are excluded from certain crucial activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than those of the roles of men. It seems fair to say, that all contemporary societies are to some extent male dominated and although the degree and experience of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is greatly universal fact of life”. A number of historical records show that in spite of women’s major role in societal and familial responsibilities, they are being treated as inferior and passive beings.

**Indian Women:**

Down the ages, women have been occupants of weaker section and have suffered and survived through inequality. Empirical evidences demonstrate that the social position of Indian women varied through the ages. The status of Indian women during the Vedic period was near equal to that of men. The status of women was not low; they had ample rights in the social and religious fields and limited rights in the economic and political fields. They enjoyed freedom in selecting their mates. In the household, they enjoyed complete freedom and were treated as ‘Ardhangini’. They had many opportunities in performing religious duties. There was a provision for widow remarriage in the form of
'Niyoga'. They were initiated into education by the sacrament of 'Upanayana'. In inheritance of property women's right were limited. As a daughter, though women had no share in her father's property yet, each unmarried daughter was entitled to one-fourth share of patrimony received by her brothers. Married daughter received only the 'Stridhana'.

During the Post-Vedic period sex discrimination emerged gradually. At this stage women came to be recognized as wife and mother. The status of women further declined in the smriti period. Manmade rules suppressed the freedom women enjoyed up to this time. The lawgivers rejected the Vedic notion. Women were strictly confined to the home. Increasingly, they were made to be dependent on men. Overall, women were respected but certain restrictions were also being placed on them. In the epic age also the status of women was not satisfactory. The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha describe the significance of a Hindu ideal woman hood and highlight the duties and obedience of wife towards her husband.

As compared to the puranas age, the age of Buddhism and Jainism is considered a little progressive as far as women's status is concerned. The status of women improved a little, though there was no tremendous change. In the social field, they had an honoured place. However, their political and economic status remained unchanged.
During the medieval period, the Muslim invaders further brought down the status of women in India. This period is considered the darkest period in the history of Indian women. To protect the Hindu women from harassment by Muslim rulers the purdha system was introduced in the Northern Indian Society. Moreover, practices like early marriage, female infanticide, enforced widowhood, etc. and exploitation of women came into vogue.

After the establishment of the British administration, liberal attitude of the British on this issue brought about some changes in the social and economic structure of the Indian way of life. Some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women in education, employment and social rights.

Industrialisation, education and the resultant change in the economic structure of the society created new values and behaviour patterns. At the end of 19th century, the reform movement started by various leaders - for instance, Justice Ranade, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswathi, Vivekananda and so on - succeeded in arousing social consciousness for the equal rights of women. During this period, the reform movements helped to weaken the evil-practices of child marriage, sati custom, enforced widowhood, etc. This was also the period, which encouraged female literacy.

After Indian independence, a new hope emerged in the lives of Indian women. The constitution of independent India accepted equality of sexes. It provided for equal rights for women. Various legislations were passed and amended in order to remove the disabilities of women that caused exploitation and misery. In spite of these attempts, in reality, majority of Indian women are still relatively powerless and discriminated. Indian women are still under traditional customs and have been prevented by orthodoxy from enjoying constitutional rights. Since the beginning, Indian women were differentiated in terms of sex.
As Devesia and Devesia (1991) point out "Despite of high status of women during Vedic period gender bias is entrenched deeply in the cultural heritage. Women of all classes suffer from inequality with their men. Traditionally male and female role have been quite distinct – in Indian Society". A continues degradation of the position of women as taken place since the period of Purana, Smriti, Moghal and so on.

It is generally accepted that patriarchy as a dominant ideology significantly influences Indian women in all walks of life. As true elsewhere, women in India are also dictated largely by the patriarchal values that keep them subordinate in familial relationships. According to Banerjee (1992) "Indian patriarchy has its own characteristics; chief of this would be the fact that though its beneficiaries are male, agents for enforcement are all members of family". Patriarchy is expressed in all relations of life; for instance, on marriage, in adopting husband’s surname, in ownership of property decision making, shifting of house etc.

In the traditional Indian social set-up, the daughter is put under the strict supervision of her parents with regard to her behaviour and attitude. She is expected to possess all which are culturally defined and patterned. The role she has to perform in her family is fixed and pre-oriented. Emphasizing the role of daughter in the traditional Indian society, Cormack (1981) points out that the Indian girls grownup with
strongly maintained family relationships and customs. She writes “they learn their function, their power and learn to feel their importance in home as transmitters of cultural heritage. They do not face agonizing decisions in their daily lives”. Women continue to submit themselves to the superiority of male.

In Indian family, man has to take up the important role of earning a living for family. He keeps control of family finances. This gives him the power and authority over the woman. The woman’s role is recognized in the domestic sphere within the household. Even if she is earning, it is considered subsidiary to that of man’s. Hence, exercise of authority and decision-making power vests with the man. Though woman’s suggestions might influence some decisions, women are expected to abide by the decisions of men. In the sphere of domestic life, in selection of brides and deciding on celebrations of occasions, woman’s suggestions do not carry much weight. Woman’s opinion may be taken but it is the man, who decides. The male members of the family are empowered to take any decisions on family matter, and a woman conditioned to look down upon herself and submit herself to the acknowledged superiority of the male.

The historical survey on the status of women in India provides evidences for proposing that women in India have suffered considerable injustice and discrimination for a long time. The traditional Indian
family is male dominated; a woman was considered to be dependent and under the protection of man all through the life. The concept of woman as an independent person, free to develop her personality, has been non-existent. She is trained to strictly accept domestic roles as relatively more important than any other. She is not trained to demand equality or question male superiority and protest against discrimination. She herself often holds negative attitude towards her role in the family and society. Consequently, men enjoy supremacy over women both in family and in society.

**Concept of Power:**

The sociological literature on the concept 'power' is varied and voluminous. Power is an analytical concept. It is difficult to measure power exactly through indicators and detect its presence because power always differs in varied degrees and in various situations. There is a distinction between power and authority. Authority as defined by Leacock (1986) is influence exerted through publicly recognized channels. ‘Power’ according to Leacock refers “to the influence exerted through informal channels.” Max Weber understands ‘power’ as the ability to influence others irrespective of their will. Authority is a legal, formal power. There is some overlapping between these two terms because in some situations the term ‘power’ also has an economic and political connection.
According to Sharma (1999) "Social Power can be described as an ability to do things, capacity to produce effects, which specifically derives from the existence of social relationships and organized social interactions". Power is understood as a phenomenon concerned with consequences but attempts to specify the concept more rigorously have been fraught with disagreements. While analysing the concept of 'power', Weber, in his famous essay, entitled "Class, Status, Party" (1967) said, "social stratification refers essentially to a distribution of power in society". According to Weber, there are different bases of power like the economic base, social status, honour, which are normally communities (He considers caste to be an ideal-typical example of the status group) and the third major basis of power lies in political parties.

We attach to the term 'power' more or less the same meaning which has been given to it by Weber (1948) "in general, we understood by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action". Thus, in this sense, power is the ability to influence others irrespective of their will. Power structure refers to the total network of power relations within the community, both formal and informal, which determines major decisions and action.

Power is an aspect of all relationships of social interdependence, from intimate interdependence of husband and wife to the
interdependence of larger social units such as Nation-States. The power and authority held by woman in any community demand her ability to make decisions about her own personal action and her responsibility to make decisions about the action of others. While dealing with the process of decision-making in the family and at work place, we would like to study the nature of power achieved by or authority exercised by women.

The status of women can be referred to as a set of rights and privileges associated with their roles and, consequent position and power in relation to men in a given society. Women are subordinates to men because they are powerless. Men exercise power over them. The locus of power may lay with the men in the household such as husband, fathers in law or husband’s elder brother. With reference to women power, Chaterji (1993) defines “as ‘women’s ability to determine important events in their lives, even when men and other women are opposed to them’”. Thus, power is understood as women’s ability to take independent decisions on personal matters like education, career, marriage, fertility, divorce, remarriage etc. Women face unequal power relation in their daily interactions not only in their families but outside the home also. Powerlessness of women does not exist in one sphere alone. Instead, powerlessness in one sphere leads to powerlessness in the other spheres.
Decision Making Power:

Self-realisation is the basic requirement for women to enjoy equal status and power with their male counterparts. In the traditional family system, women have subordinate authority and power compared to men. In order to assess, women's power and authority in a given society, it is essential to survey the power held by women as members of that society and the extent of decision-making power they have in family and work-related life.

Decision-making is an orderly process. As Griffiths (1979) states “Decision making is a process, which one goes through, in order to pass judgment and terminate controversy”. There are three dimensions to decision making, in order to differentiate various types of power and authority held by women in different economic and cultural settings. As V. Majumdar (1978) points out the “first dimension is distinction achieved by, or authority accorded to individual woman, such as monarch or cult leader, and that held by women as members of their sex. Second is the distinction between the ability to make decisions about one's own action; usually called; dependence or autonomy and the ability, or responsibility to make decisions about the actions of others. The third dimension is the distinction between the objective structure of decision-making and ideological and cultural definition, evolutions and validations of that structure.”
Women in general have very little power of decision-making. A survey conducted by the committee on the status of women in 1974 found that the women members have marginal role to play in decision-making. The only decision they take is in connection with buying food items. Other decisions regarding educational careers for children, jobs, and marriage for sons are, by and large, taken in consultation with other family members. The decision making power in the family and at working-places rests with men, that is husbands, fathers, in-laws, sons, male colleagues, etc.

Decision-making is the root of every human activity. Participation in decision-making reflects the status of any individual, which increases with the growing participation up to the final decision. Women are not involved in this process even on decisions pertaining to their own lives and activities.

Empowerment:

The term ‘empowerment’ refers to a wide range of activities from self-assertion to collective resistance. Assessment of this term is not an easy task. The concept of ‘empowerment’ is manifested in different aspects of person’s social life. It encompasses life spheres including the realization of one’s capacity and potentiality, determining her/his choices and to have control over them. Empowerment is a multidimensional
process, which should enable individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision-making to enable them to have the ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and be free from customs, beliefs and practices. Generally, development with justice is expected to generate forces that lead to empowerment of various sections of population in a society to raise their status.

In the last two decades, the concept of 'Empowerment of women' is being associated increasingly with gender justice and gender equality. Empowerment of women does not mean giving them power to dominant others or establish their superiority over others; it is empowering themselves. Empowerment of women means equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, and to have a positive attitude to face any difficult situation. In other words, women should be able to participate in the process of decision-making. One can feel empowered only if there is recognition of one's status externally.

Women’s empowerment means entitlement of women to have and enjoy power over their lives both as individuals and members of social system. UNIFEM, an international organization for women working within the U.N. system, recognizes the following as key components of women’s empowerment.
1) Women’s sense of self worth.
2) Their entitlement to have and determine choices.
3) They’re right to have access to opportunities and resources.
4) Their rights to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside home.
5) Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The Centre for Social Research viewed empowerment as autonomous both collective and individual. The empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and supported by economic independence. A critical component to achieve economic independence is access to and control over productive resources. Second component is knowledge and awareness of one’s self and society, and of personal needs, health issues, legal rights, technological innovations and availability of social and economic resources and how to take advantage of them.

The third component in this regard is self-image. This includes realization of one’s capabilities and potential and confidence to take action in one’s life. Both economic independence and knowledge help to create a positive image, but confidence in one’s own self can also
facilitate the question of further knowledge and reaction towards attaining economic independence.

The final component is autonomy, which in its ultimate realization, is empowerment at the level of the society. For women empowerment is the reconstructing of gender relations within both the family and in society, and it is society’s recognition of women’s equality with men in terms of their worth to society as independent persons.

All the above said issues may be put in a nutshell. In determining the empowerment of women, factors such as the role of women in the decision-making power in the family and community, their educational status, their participation in social and political activities, their position in various professions, their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance of property, seeking health care, and so on should be taken into consideration. The approach to women’s empowerment should be comprehensive and integrated in nature.

The present study looks into the following components of empowerment of the Scheduled Caste women in urban Karnataka, following the conceptual explanation provided in the earlier pages.

1) Empowerment in terms of economic and financial independence.

2) Empowerment in terms of knowledge and awareness of one’s own life and society including personal needs, health issues, legal
rights, technological innovations and availability of social resources.

3) Empowerment in terms of self-image including realization of one's own capabilities and potential.

4) Finally, empowerment in terms of realization of power, status and equality in opportunities at the level of society.

Let me list out various vital aspects of life to be considered for empowerment of women in general. The list is exhaustive and elaborate. Women should have higher literacy and education, economic and financial independence, skill development, awareness, better care of health for herself and her children, higher age at marriage, acceptance of small family norm, self-reliance, self respect and dignity among women, better consciousness of rights, etc. Empowerment helps women in making their own choices, and enables her to have greater ability in decision-making. It also provides opportunities and facilities to utilize their innate qualities, to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-dignity. Empowerment enables them to raise their status with regard to their lives.

Scheduled Caste:

Indian society is of a very complex and diverse population, which is unique in the world for its caste structure with hierarchical nature.
Since the dawn of history, Indian society has suffered from diverse types of social disabilities. Some of the most severe social disabilities and inequalities are centered on the institution of caste. The caste system is deep rooted in the social structure of Indian society.

The caste system, a form of social stratification is peculiar to India. There is no institution elsewhere in the world comparable to the Indian caste system. Caste is clearly connected with the Hindu religion. This system is believed to have had a divine origin and sanction. Caste is a deep rooted and long-lasting social institution of India. In India, we find thousands of castes and sub castes with all their peculiarities.

The caste stratification in Indian society has had its origin in the chaturvarna system. According to the chaturvarna doctrine, Hindu society was divided into four varnas namely the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vyshyas and the Shudras. This varna system was prevalent during the vedic period and was based on the division of labour and occupation. The present caste system (which was previously known as varnas) can be said is the degenerated form of the original varna system found in almost all states of India.

For ages certain groups of people in India, suffered social isolation and disability. These people belong to certain castes listed by the president of India in pursuance of the relevant provisions of the
constitution. They are named as “Scheduled Castes”. Though being doctrinally outside the Hindu society, existentially the Scheduled Castes have been an integral part of the Indian society.

'Scheduled Caste' refers to such castes, which have undergone economic, social and religious discrimination for relatively a long time. This group includes hundreds of sub castes, differing from one another in terms of their traditional occupations, language, nomenclature, numerical strength and socio-cultural ethos. This group of castes belongs to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste hierarchy, whose touch or proximity is considered polluting by the caste Hindus. Members of this caste group have had degraded nature of working relations with the higher castes, without access to the vital economic resources and power, resulting in becoming the most exploited peripheral group in the Indian society. Historical evidences show that these groups of castes have been completely undermined by the controlling elite group and their social existence was ignored except for their services of menial nature.

The term 'Scheduled Caste' in the present Indian context refers to a list of castes prepared by the British Government of India in 1935. During the ancient and medieval period these castes were known as 'Panchamas' 'Chandalas' 'Anthyajas' and during the British period they came to be called first as 'Depressed classes'; later as 'Harijanas' and finally as 'Scheduled Caste' (Castes listed in the Govt. Schedule).
The historical literature reveals how these groups were subject to various types of humiliations before they came to enjoy the economic and social privileges along with the other castes in India.

According to Majumdar (1961) "in the Post-Vedic period the four classes became rigidly structured, closed hierarchical groups, each following its own occupation and its rules of endogamy. Each one of them included a number of sub castes. Gradually marriage between castes came to be treated as violation of norms of inter-castes. Children born of such unions were called the mixed breed (varna sankara) and were not given the caste of either of the parents, but were placed outside the four classes, nor were they allowed to take up profession of the four classes. As such, they had to engage in occupations that involved dealing with dirty things. They were debarred from attending the social and religious ceremonies of the four classes. Therefore, they had to create their own socio-religious life. As they had unclean habits they followed defiling occupations and led such socio-religious life, they were classed as untouchables".

As a separate class this group included several caste groups comprising lower artisans such as skinners, tanners, shoe makers and makers of musical instruments. Several of them served as agricultural labourers. They lived outside the villages in isolated areas that were not clean. Gradually, they were prohibited from entering the temples
drawing water from the public wells, approaching the wards inhabited by other castes and following any occupation other than their own. Thus, they suffered many socio-economic disabilities and ended up becoming the most backward and exploited class of people.

In the medieval period, the 'Panchamas' came to be designated as 'Avarnas' 'Achuthas' or 'Asprusyas', while people belonging to the four classes were designated 'Savarnas'. Unlike the 'Panchamas' in the post-vedic period, those in the medieval period had to suffer more severe social, economic, political and religious disabilities because of the greater conservation of the caste system in this period.

During the British period, 'Avarnas' were designated as 'Depressed Classes', later as 'Exterior Castes' and finally as 'Scheduled Caste'. To identify the 'depressed classes' the maharaja of Baroda first used the term 'untouchables'. The census of 1901 identified some castes suffering from disabilities and classed them as 'unclean castes'.

In the mean time saint Narsimha Mehta coined the term 'Harijan' (Children of God) to refer to 'untouchables'. In 1933, Mahathma Gandhi adopted it and popularized the term; Ambedkar opposed the word 'Harijan'. "In 1935 as recommended by the Simon Commission, the term 'Scheduled Caste' was adopted by the British government as a
substitute to all other words hitherto used for identifying untouchables”.  

Even after achieving independence in 1947, the constitution of India has used the word ‘Scheduled Caste’. The term ‘Scheduled Caste’ has not been defined anywhere in the Constitution. Article 34 of the Constitution clarifies as follows: ‘Scheduled Castes’ means such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Act 341 to be scheduled castes for the purpose of the constitution of India. Hence, Scheduled Castes are those groups, which are named in the Scheduled Caste order in force for the time being”.  

A large number of Scheduled Castes in India live in subhuman conditions, existing exploitation, poverty and powerlessness. They have become one of the most exploited peripheral groups in the Indian society. Members of this group of people belong to the lowest stratum in the Hindu social hierarchy. They live with other castes of the society and are scattered through every State.  

Scheduled Caste population constitutes a significant fraction of the total population of India. In 1991 they shared 16.48 Percent of the total population. As in other parts of India, in Karnataka also, the Scheduled Castes have been associated with poverty and exploitation by the strong and advanced sections of the society for many centuries.
Scheduled Caste Women:

Looking gender as one mode of fragmentation of identity in both dominant castes as well as the Scheduled Castes we shall see that women of both groups are placed very differently both in their own group and the other. The Scheduled Caste women are such a separated segment of the Indian society. The Scheduled Caste women who comprise a number of traditionally low order castes have been the virtual underdogs of the Hindu society. They continue to be kept out of the main stream of the Hindu social life. The level of awareness among Scheduled Caste women in India regarding their rights including political, legal and economic rights and how to take advantage of them is still very low. They still lag behind in all most all fields and are undergoing hardship and suffering.

The power structure among Scheduled Caste women is highly differentiated. The power among them splits vertically. This is so because Scheduled Caste women in Indian society suffer from dual disadvantages; of being women and being Scheduled Caste. As we know, the Scheduled Caste group itself is differentiated by other castes. Scheduled Caste women suffer all the deprivations, which their caste group as a whole suffers. They are discriminated against and dominated by the surrounding high caste people. In the larger social context also, they are neglected in terms of class, ethnic practices, education, occupation, etc.
Besides, the domination of high caste groups in the society they have to undergo additional hardships because of their gender position. In their families, adult males dominate Scheduled Castes women. Even with a cursory glance one gets a distinct feeling that they are discriminated by male members in their families in terms of decision making, decision participation and decision alterations. Hence, Scheduled Caste women suffer from double discrimination of their low-caste position as well as the gender bias.

However, with the emergence of modern social forces and because of Indian contact with the West, a gradual change started taking place in the attitude of the Hindus towards the low castes. After independence, especially after the establishment of democratic republic of India, a number of steps were taken by the Central and State Governments to raise the socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste groups. Towards this, numerous facilities are extended to Scheduled Castes.

The year 2001 has been declared as "Women's Empowerment Year". In this connection, the Indian Government has announced elaborate schemes for empowerment of women and the safeguards of women's right. But still women especially Scheduled Caste women, due to double discrimination, are suffering from disabilities and inequalities.
The Schedule Caste women, constituting separate category, have typical problems as compared to other women in our society. Most of the research and studies on Scheduled Caste women have concentrated on their social and economic conditions and on physical violence which Scheduled Caste women have been subjected to often by high caste men. Only a few studies have shed light on the interconnection between caste and gender. The present study is an attempt to look closely into the question of powerlessness, sense of identity and empowerment of this ignored and degraded group that is Scheduled Caste women.

**Urban Karnataka:**

For census purpose an urban area is defined as “all places with a municipality, corporation or cantonment board or notified town area”\(^\text{21}\). The total area of Karnataka, a state in South India is 19174 Sq Km. It has a larger proportion of its population living in urban area (33.98 percent) than the average for the country which, as a whole is 27.78 percent.

The State is divided into five major geo-climatic regions namely the Coastal Belt, Malnad, Semi-Malnad, Southern Maidan and Northern Maidan. About 66 percent of the state populations speak Kannada, the regional language. The sex ratio for the state is 933 females per 1000 males in 2001; the sex ratio of total, rural and urban
population of India is 933, 946 and 901 respectively. The figure of the 2001 census show that in Karnataka total literacy is 67.04 percent whereas, the rural literacy is 59.68 percent.

The Scheduled Caste population of Karnataka is about 16.38 percent of Indian Scheduled Caste population as per census 1991. The list of Scheduled Castes in Karnataka in 2001 includes 101 castes.

More than one tenth of the population of the country resides in cities. The rural urban break-up in Karnataka is in the ratio 2:1. Karnataka has a larger proportion of its population living in urban area (33.98 percent) than the average for the country as a whole, (27.78 percent). 14.37 percent of the country’s urban population is in Maharastra State followed by Uttar Pradesh with 12.09 percent. Karnataka’s contribution as per 2001 provisional census report is 6.28 percent.

For the purpose of the present study, primary data is collected in three urban localities in Karnataka. According to the demographic and socio-economic factors, three urban centers are selected; they are Bangalore as a Metropolis, Hubli-Dharwad as a large city and Shimoga as a small city. These three urban centers represent the southern, northern and central parts of Karnataka respectively.
Literature Review:

The present study is concerned with empowerment of Scheduled Caste women in urban Karnataka. This part of the chapter confines itself to the review of literature in three related areas, namely, women and empowerment, Scheduled Caste women and decision-making power.

Since the announcement of the international women's year in 1975, various organizations in India as well as in other parts of the world are engaged in studies on diversified subjects concerning women and their social position. A large number of seminars, symposium and conferences have also been organized. A considerable large volume of literature has been produced on this issue as well. The literature on Indian women and their status and power also is not too small.

The concern for empowerment of Scheduled Caste women has occupied the attention of many sociologists in recent years because of its high social relevance. Because of such attempts, enough sociological and anthropological literature in this regard is available at the global level as well as in the present Indian context. The sociological understanding of the study area under this research study presents a picture, which leaves many gaps to be filled; however, the present study has focused specially on the examination of the extent of decision-making power among
Scheduled Caste Women in urban Karnataka in the comprehensive process of empowerment.

Let me begin by presenting some relevant studies in this area at the global level. References are abundant on the concept of sexual division, discrimination, status and power of women in general as well as particular. In Andre Beteilles study of Sriram Puram village, in Tanjavur district, Tamil Naidu (1967) he attempts to study caste, class and power relationships. One of such relevant studies is by Sanday entitled “Female power and male dominance: on the origins of sexual equality” (1981). In this book, the author examines the power and dominance in male-female relationships. ‘How the culturally approved interaction between sexes originated’ is a basic question for discussion here. It is a cross-cultural research on tribal society. The author provides a new explanation of the origin and perpetuation of sexual inequality. She establishes the full range of variation in male and female power roles. Sandy rejects the argument of universal female subordination. She argues that male dominance is not inherited in human relations, but as a solution to various kinds of cultural strains. According to Sandy, power and dominance are determinated by people’s adaption to their environment, social conflict and emotional stress.

“Sexual Meanings; the Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality”, edited by Ortner and Whitchet (1981) is a collection of
essays on the ways in which sex and gender are socially recognized and conceptually constructed in various cultures, sex roles and sex status.

Usha Rao's "Women in a Developing Society" (1985), is a collection of research studies, focused mainly on the women in Karnataka. In the chapters, historical review of the gradual changes that have been taking place in the educational, political and legal status of women in Karnataka has been presented in order to understand their position.

Another collection of articles in gender studies "visibility and power" essays on women in society and development – edit by Leela Dube Eleanor, Leocock, Shirley Ardner (1986) reflects major concern in the area of dimension of power.

One of the most interesting studies on Indian women is by Maitreyi Krishna Raj (1986) "women studies in India some perspectives". The author discusses power and status of Indian women. According to her, women are subordinate because they are powerless. Women of all classes suffer from inequality with their men. Women lack autonomy in matters relating to marriage choice, choice of career, education, matters of life style and so on.
Another work on the nature of power in human society is by Michael Mann. His book "the sources of social power" (1986) includes a history of power in human society.

"Socialization Education and Women" – explanations in gender identity edited by Karuna Chanana (1988) - includes papers presented at a seminar organized by the Nehru memorials museum and library. This book explores how women are socialized into their roles and how they internalise the often-negative images, which are provided under this socialization.

"Women, Law and Social Change in India" (1989) by Indu Prakash, traces the impact of legislation on the status of women and social changes in India from 1947 to 1981. It gives a detailed analysis of laws pertaining to marriage, guardianship, adoption, divorce, maintenance and inheritance right. It examines the question of reservation for women. The book concludes that law in India has performed an innovative rather than integrative or adoptive role. It highlights that major changes in law have been made because of the protest and demand of the social reformers, activists and women organisations.

Amoury be Riencourt in "Women and Power in History" (1989) analyses the distinction between man and woman, examines her against
the ethical, aesthetic, economic, social, religious and political backgrounds of culture and exposes her diminished status in western civilization. S.K. Ghosh in his book “Indian Women through the Ages” (1989) discusses the status and conditions of women in the course of long history of Indian civilization.

Another relevant study regarding status of women in general is by John Longdon Davies in his book “Short History of Women” (1990). In this work Davies explains the forces and elements which combined to produce the myth of a female character which was observed by our immediate ancestors so that even in our own day it is still hard for the average men and women to so believe.

Shettar’s (1991), research paper “Employment of Wife and Domestic Power Structure” reveals that economic status of wife as a wage earner and contributor to the family budget that enables her to have a say in decision-making process of the family. She argues that power is the ability to carryout one’s will in the face of opposition and the employment of women has definitely reinforced that ability.

Devesia and Devesia, “Empowering women for sustainable development” (1991), is a book based on a project, which narrates empowerment of women and their struggle to achieve economic independence and freedom through their needs. It explains the struggle
of women in slum areas in Nagpur city to achieve social justice, economic independence and freedom. The main objective of the project is to create awareness, among women and to encourage and organise them. And finally, the author suggests that when a woman attains economic independence, she naturally becomes owner of her own decisions. Das, Mohan in 1991 in their research paper “Gender and Work”, show that employment results in women’s higher status in family decision-making process.

“Discrimination Against Women: can we over come it?” is the significant contribution edited by Dr. Mohammed Peer and Dr. Odeyar D. Heggade. Their papers and proceedings of the National Seminar held in 1992 provide various forms of discriminations practiced against women in economic, social, educational and cultural dimensions.

“Analysing Women’s work under Patriarchy” is a paper presented on women’s studies in India by N.Banarjee in 1992. He has pointed out that patriarchy as a dominant ideology significantly influences Indian women in all walks of life. As a result, women today face double discrimination.

Shoma Chaterji’s work, “The Indian Woman in Perspective” (1993), is an attempt to study a woman in her own cultural and historical background and in comparison with her counterparts
elsewhere in the world, in general. One of the most relevant present studies undertaken by Leelamma Devasia, V.V.Devasia is “Empowering Women for Sustainable Development” (1994) which reveals the empowering women as a necessity for sustainable development of the community.

The central theme of the book by Jaya Kothari “Women and Empowerment” (1995) is that women have to empower themselves. They have to understand the causes of the existing equality of women in all sectors – economic – political social, legal and educational and take initiative to change their status. She analyses the status of females in terms of their rights, and their socio-economic and educational development, and discusses the strategies of empowerment. The author has collected information on women-professionals the world over and makes a comparison with that of Indian findings.

Women’s Education and Employment in relation to the Acceptance of Changing Gender Role Expectations and Small Family Norm in Urban Karnataka, is a thesis submitted to Kuvempu University by D.K.Sudha (1998). With socialist feminism perspective, the thesis focuses its attention on education and employment as the two significant variables in relation to changing gender expectations acceptance of the small family norm and consequent power and status of women in family and society. In order to have a global picture of women’s status,
R.K. Tandon in his book "Status of Women in Contemporary World" (1998), presents a review of some of the developed, developing and under developed countries in terms of the position occupied by women in different social structures.

A study by S.W.R.G. for Family Planning Association of India (2000) has brought out "Male Attitude Towards Empowerment and Contraceptive Practices". It is the outcome of a study carried out by the society and women research group for Family Planning Association of India, and it reveals the subtle resentment of males both in support and participation in the family planning programmes. The study reaffirms most of the often known socio-cultural traits like early marriages of girls, birth of boy being celebrated with grandeur, decision-making, resting with husband and in-laws, health care facilities being inadequate, women bearing stigma of being infertile, gender discrimination in seeking health care and even immunization at times, attitude of men towards education of girls, house hold work, etc.

"Need for Women Empowerment" (2000), written by Neetha Tapan, attempts to study women-empowerment in India with special reference to the state of Madhya Pradesh. The author analyses issues like gender discrimination, population dynamics, health, education and employment. The study provides insight into the whole process of women empowerment.
A number of studies about the Scheduled Castes have been undertaken in general. One of the relevant studies to the present enquiry was undertaken by Harshad Trivedi "Scheduled Caste Women: Studies in Exploitation". This work is based on two major studies, one of which was sponsored by Indian council of social science research, on behalf of the committee on the status of women. It studies the ignorance, poverty and superstition of women. It focuses on the exploitation of Scheduled Caste women for prostitution. The survey included Bijapur in Karnataka, Raipur in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Kashi in Uttar Pradesh.

S.N. Sadashivan in his paper "Why the Down Trodden Need Reservation?" (1981), talks about the reservation policy. The author says that reservation as a constitutional right is, nevertheless, designed to offset the disadvantages of centuries of oppression. Reservation needs to be continued until economic and social inequalities are abolished or at least reduced to a considerable extent.

"Deprived Castes in India", by N.J. Usha Rao, 1981, is an attempt in constructing a profile of Scheduled Castes in Karnataka. The study sketches a brief outline of the various castes and communities that constitute the ‘category’ known as Scheduled Castes. The study was conducted during 1973-75 as part of the ISES’s research programme.
The studies of Gore in 1968, Singh in 1981, Khan in 1983, and Perumal in 1983, state that the strong cultural base in India denies the women the freedom to take decisions on contraception and family size. The other research works by Anker in 1985 also conclude that Indian women in general play a negligible role in decision-making, especially in relation to fertility and conception.

Dr. Sarn Singh (1987) conducted a study on Scheduled Castes of India to assess the status of this group. "Women and Socialization" by Usha S. Kahere (1987) is another study of status and role among lower castes in Ahmedabad.

A research study undertaken by B.P. Chourasia (1990), with the title "Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in India", reveals how Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have been suffering since ages. He says that the caste plays an all-important role in Indian society; as at every stage throughout human life, caste is taken into consideration and almost all activities revolve round the caste. According to Chourasia, Scheduled Castes have been a highly neglected group and have been left behind in rapid development. They constitute the poorest and the weakest section of the Indian society. "Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe in India" H.C. Upadhyaya (1991) is a collection of research paper and articles on discrimination and social upliftment of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. Another related study is "Dalits: a Sub-human

“Women and Depressed Caste Population in India” by Mathur (1994), says that both women and depressed caste have been economically depressed and politically suppressed in the society. Though the Government has provided privileges for the uplift of these people, most of them continue to suffer. This book deals with distribution and growth, literacy and occupational structure of suppressed population.

“Dalit Women in India”, edited by Jogdand (1995), provides an explanation of the specificities of Dalit Women in India, their problems, sufferings etc. This study presents a new approach and a theoretical perspective for the study of an important Indian social reality of crucial issues concerning Dalit Women.

“Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed”, edited by Kotani (1997) reflects the outcome of many academic and field activities undertaken by a group of Japanese researchers which was organized in 1989 to conduct intensive, multifaceted research on the caste system and untouchability.
Subhadra Mitra Channa in her research paper “The Right to Self Hood: The paradox of being a Dalit women” (2000), examines how the concept of human rights can be applied to the situation of dalits in India with special focus on the lives of women. The dalit issues should be examined in the light of broader framework of sociological theory along with data on dalits, with oppression in many social situations.

Various studies cited here throw light on definition of the term Scheduled Castes, their origin, evolution of caste; atrocities committed on them by high caste Hindus and legislative measures provided to them by the Government. Studies related to educational problems of Scheduled Caste, social exploitation of Scheduled Caste women have also been highlighted.

**Need for the Study:**

Confinelement within four walls of house, restrictions, list of problems faced by women in India is endless. Backwardness in education, social norms, and economic condition have ensured that women continue to be secondary to men. However, only a small proportion of Indian urban women have come a long way to make careers in certain jobs. The question is have they actually earned their due rights, like freedom to express their opinion and take their independent decision? Education is considered a step towards
empowerment. But even then, there are many educated women who suffer from gender prejudices and several other problems.

Indian philosophers said, "God lives where women are respected". All reformers and revolutionary leaders have advocated equal rights, privileges and social status for both men and women. Thinkers like Karl Marx, Gandhi and Ambedkar, have opposed the rigid distinction between the roles of men and women. The keynote of United Nations declaration (1980) on the elimination of discrimination against women is that the development of society requires full participation by all sectors of the population and opportunities for full development potentialities of women. Nevertheless, contrary to all these preaching and ideals, women throughout the world continue to be regarded as 'inferior and weaker partners to men. Consequently, women are adversely treated and subjected to discrimination on grounds of sex.

In recent years, the concern for empowering Scheduled Caste women has occupied the attention of many sociologists because of its social relevance. A good number of studies have been done on the status of women in general. Most of the studies have dealt with women's education and employment. Voluminous sociological studies on Scheduled Caste women are available now. Most of these studies on Scheduled Caste women have concentrated on their problems and sufferings, and how they are subjected them to high caste men. But not
much has been done on the interconnection between caste and gender, none has enough been done to analyse the concern for decision-making power of Scheduled Caste women, nor have its determinants been investigated. Studies on decision-making power of Scheduled Caste women in particular are rarely found. For this purpose, a systematic sociological enquiry is the need of the hour. This necessitates an empirical and critical study of Scheduled Caste women in the context of urban Karnataka. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

**Importance of the Study:**

The social relevance and importance of such a study is obvious. Women, especially women from the lowest stratum in the caste hierarchy, are understood as having little opportunity for their comprehensive self-development. This study, which examines the process of empowerment of women, becomes vital in understanding the problems of women as well as Scheduled Castes women in an integral fashion. Data from such a study have serious implications for policy-formulation and planning in women's welfare programmes. Conclusions drawn from this investigation are expected to generalize on the nature of empowerment of women in the country, besides shedding special light on this most neglected group. The results of the present study clearly demonstrate socio-economic conditions and powerlessness of this downtrodden section of the Indian society.
Scheme of the Study:

The next chapter, Chapter Two, provides details on the methodology adopted in the study that includes statement of the problem, broad objectives and working hypotheses of the study. It also includes study universe, sampling method, and the study sample, tools and techniques of data collection.

Chapter Three contains demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the study area and sample, along with figures in tabular form with specific data on respondent’s age, education and other socio-economic and demographic variables.

In Chapter Four, the nature of power structure among the Scheduled Caste women in terms of family and work related to decision-making is discussed. The power dimension of Scheduled Caste women in families and in relation to social institutions such as marriage, gainful employment and the like, in terms of power of participation, decision making and decision alterations, is analysed. How Scheduled Caste women workers are discriminated and how they treated by other colleagues in the formal working place and the like are described in this chapter.
Chapter Five describes and analyses the perception of the study sample regarding discrimination and exploitation of Scheduled Caste women by the high caste groups in the surroundings. How the Scheduled Caste women are dominated over by male members of their own family and community is also a point of discussion here. This chapter also analyses caste discrimination and gender prejudices. Further data on the level of awareness among Scheduled Caste women in urban areas regarding political, legal rights and health is presented and discussed.

The last chapter of the thesis, Chapter Six, presents a summary of the findings of the study along with study conclusions and some broad suggestions and recommendations for improving the economic and power dimensions of Scheduled Caste women.

Appendices given at the end of the thesis provide overview information and a Karnataka Map is given along with interview schedule, and bibliography at the end.
References:


19. Constitution of India, The Scheduled Caste, and The President of India has powers to issue the list of Scheduled Castes order of 1950 after consultation with the Governor of any State.

