CHAPTER III

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION
AND STRATEGIES

3.1 Introduction

From the previous chapter it is clear that while the phenomenon of women's inequality is universal, only it's magnitude and severity vary from country to country and within a country, from community to community. The Population Crisis Committee (USA) using different indicators of gender inequality examined the status of women in 99 countries including India in 1988 (HDR, 1990). But it found that in none of these countries there was perfect gender equality. Therefore, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the concept of empowerment of women in the wider context of gender inequality as it assumes great significance.

Empowerment is envisaged as an aid to reduce gender gap considerably. Empowerment would enable women to perform social roles, which they cannot perform without it. In the Indian situation, this would mean helping women to enjoy their constitutional and legal right to equality in real life. Moreover, the term empowerment of women is gaining popularity and wide usage more often than terms like women's welfare, upliftment, development or awareness raising. Though in the context of women development the word 'empowerment' is frequently used, neither the term nor its dimensions had been understood properly. Therefore, this chapter will be worthwhile, as it not only clarifies the concept of empowerment of women but also its various components and describes its aspects such as political, social, economic, legal and cultural. It also throws light on the ongoing approaches, existing empowerment strategies, their shortcomings and suggestions to modify the same.
3.2 Development: Base for Empowerment of Women

Till recently, development was taken to mean economic development. But now, the economic aspect, though important and relevant, is not over emphasized for it is correctly perceived that development\(^1\) is a multi-dimensional process which involves not just an acceleration of economic growth to reduce inequality and eradicate poverty and progression of a traditional society towards modernization but also a march towards ideals of democracy, namely liberalism, egalitarianism and justice - social and distributive. Besides, development today is human development, which undoubtedly covers all people. According to\(^2\) M.S.Gore, "Development is social + economic + political +..." So development is incomplete without developing the human resources of a given community. If human resource development is to gain a momentum then the woman should be made the focus of developmental activities, was the opinion of the scholars who were concerned with the development of women, as women constitute half the population in the world.

Today, it is impossible to propose a development strategy,\(^3\) which is not participatory because the development paradigm puts the focus on development of people and their participation. The Third World sees people as the greatest asset and believes that true development must centre on people and it is also realized that people cannot be developed from outside and they have to develop themselves by participating in activities that affect their lives. Participatory development simply means, "putting people first", giving meaning to their own actions and enabling them to take development initiatives. Participation is an end in itself whose purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of people to spearhead development themselves. It means, people must involve themselves in decision-making, implementation and evaluation of projects, which they have shaped and given to themselves. Moreover, the participation of women is integral to the development process and the term "integration of women in development" is "untenable" because women are very much at the centre of development. This has been promoted by basic-needs-strategies and on one hand, the satisfaction by fulfillment of these needs
implies equal access by male or female population to food and nutrition, primary health care and primary education, and on the other it implies that women have the capacity to contribute to the achievement of basic needs. As a result, participation of women in the process of decision-making and implementation becomes indispensable for the basic-needs-programme – especially at the level of rural community.

In addition, experience has shown that developmental projects, which were designed without the involvement of the intended beneficiaries, had failed. As a result, aid agencies within and outside India realized the need to incorporate participatory principles into their projects. Participation was offered with adequate importance, but in policy making and planning committees it was offered only with little real influence. Therefore, something more than participation was required for which the term ‘empowerment’ was coined which is frequently stimulated through participatory exercises of the people. Thus, implicit in participation is empowerment or transfer of power to the people. As a result, there was a paradigm shift, as the development strategy of women has been shifted to empowerment of women and ‘giving them a voice’ in the decisions that so directly affect their lives. Empowerment means development of skills and abilities in people to enable them to manage better, and have the say in or negotiate with the existing development delivery systems. Some see it as more fundamental and essentially concerned with enabling people to decide upon and undertake actions, which they believe are essential to their development.

From the preceding paragraphs, it is understood that development is a loaded word that encompasses the participation and empowerment of people. It has not only to do with policies and programmes but feelings, preferences and needs of people. If it erases human identity, it is worse than meaningless. Besides, from the planning experience in India it is clear that from mere economic growth to growth
with equity and justice, from government initiative to people's involvement and participation, from socio-economic development to human resource development and from endowment to empowerment, the pattern of development has come a long way.

3.3 Emanation of the Concept of Empowerment

The term empowerment of women which has gained currency during the years 1976-1996, emanated from the Third World feminists, including Indian ones and has come to be associated with women's struggle for social justice and equality. It is surprising to note that the concept of the 'empowerment of women' emanated from the Third World feminists and not from the Western feminist body politic, as it should have, after the radical feminist forerunner, Kate Millet's 'Sexual Politics', wherein she attempted to demonstrate and proclaim that there exists between the two genders an unceasing power struggle within the family in which women come out as the losers. The radical feminists of the West, instead of logically choosing after Kate Millet's revelations, to work for greater power to women that is, empowerment, opted instead to step out of the struggle. They felt that to cut themselves off from men altogether, was the only way women could come into their own and be liberated from the politics of gender. They aspired to develop a separate alternate women culture. To create spaces for women where the suddenly discovered exceptional qualities such as nurturing, caring, sharing, inter-dependence, intuitiveness, wildness, joyfulness, emotionality, perceived by the radical feminists as dues would be practiced, promoted and preserved. They felt that men were only needed for reproduction and Shulamith Firestone in her 'The Dialectics of Sex' offered the way out - "test-tube babies".

Another brand of feminists in the West labeled "liberal feminists" who, as opposed to the cessationism of the radical feminists, adopted a more conciliatory, integrationist approach and demanded equal rights with men in all spheres, in a man's world. They too did not think in terms of empowering women though,
perhaps, their demand for equal opportunities and equity contained an implicit notion of empowerment. The liberal feminists did not think in terms of transforming the established patriarchal order. The Black feminists and the Third World feminists, however, considered all Western feminists bourgeois middle class, White and even imperialist – and found themselves out of tune with the latter’s total anti-male thinking and attitudes. In the struggle against racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and class domination, the Black feminists and the Third World feminists felt a unity with their male counterparts and did not quite see men as confirmed necrophiliacs, nothing-lovers, murder-mongers and a warping and destructive lot. They agreed with the Western feminists that, at one level, there did existed a gender struggle, gender power play and gender politics to the detriment of women but they felt that the solution lay in the ‘empowerment of women’ in all spheres (Saraswati Haider, 1995).

3.4 Empowerment of Women: Conceptual Clarification

In spite of the fact that the term has gained popularity and wide usage, it has neither been given any definite and authoritative definition nor the dimensions of it had been understood properly. Since women are considered the most oppressed sections of society, the term ‘women’s empowerment’ has come to be associated with women’s struggle for social justice and equality. The Government of India, with the explicit objective of empowering women has launched several programmes and several older programmes have adopted this goal in recent years. But it has been found that in many cases, the word empowerment has simply been substituted by ‘integrated rural development’, ‘women development’, ‘community or women participation’, or ‘conscientization’. But is empowerment merely a synonym for these things? Or is it different? If it is, what is this difference and what changes does it demand in strategy?
The term empowerment is often used to describe a process whereby the powerless or disempowered gain a greater share of control of resources and decision making. This is because the most outstanding feature of the term empowerment is that it contains within it the word power. Therefore, empowerment naturally is about power and about changing the balance of power. In every society there are powerful and powerless groups. Power is exercised in social, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. Power itself can be simply defined as control over resources and control of ideology and it is exercised through a series of orders or decision-making capacity.

The resources over which control can be exercised falls into five broad categories such as: physical resources (land, water, forests); human resources (people, their bodies, their labour and skills); intellectual resources (knowledge, information, ideas); financial resources (money, access to money); and self (that unique combination of intelligence, creativity, self-esteem and confidence). Similarly, control of ideology means the ability to determine beliefs, values, attitudes and virtually control over ways of thinking and perceiving situations. Those who have power are those who control material, knowledge, resources and the ideology, which govern both public and private life, and thus are in a position to make decisions which benefit themselves. The extent of power of an individual or group is in turn correlated to how many different kinds of resources they can access and control. This control confers decision-making power, which is used to increase access to and control over resources.

If the above definition is accepted, then it is clear that women, in general and poor women in particular, are relatively powerless because they do not have control over resources, and hence little or no decision-making power. Yet the decisions made by others affect their lives everyday. Often even the limited resources at their disposal such as little land, a nearby forest, their own bodies, labour and skill are not always within their control.
This does not mean that women are always totally powerless. For centuries, they have tried to exercise some control over their own and the lives of their families by using the resources whenever they could. They have always attempted from their gendered position as mothers, wives and workers, to not only influence their immediate environment, but also expand their space. But the prevailing patriarchal ideology, which promotes the values of submission, sacrifice, obedience and silent suffering, often subverts even these attempts to assert them or demand some share of resources.

Thus the process of gaining control over the self, over ideology and the resources which determine power may be termed as empowerment. The term empowerment is rooted in the theories of Paulo Freire who put forward the notion of ‘conscientisation’ as a process by which the poor could challenge the structures of power and take control of their lives. Freire’s analysis, however, totally ignored gender as a determinant of power. Thus by expanding Freiran analysis and giving gender an integral place, feminists put forward the concept of women’s empowerment (Shashi S.Narayana, 1998).

The notion soon spread throughout the world and was defined by feminist scholars and activists in their own regional contexts. The concept of empowerment is often loosely used to mean a variety of different things, from individual self-realization and self-assertion to participation or involvement in projects in a functional sense, to the control over decisions regarding all aspects of one’s life and livelihood. The term empowerment is also used more in the sense, of attempting to change the social and economic institutions that embody the basic and unequal power structures in society, whether between individual men and women or groups of people (Nitya Rao, 1996). For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships.
From the above knowledge it is clear that empowerment is a process and not a product, aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections. 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. The empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components, but begins with and is supported by economic independence, which implies access to and control over production resources. A second component of empowerment is knowledge and awareness, the third is participation, fourth is self-image and the final is autonomy.

Empowerment is also visualized as an enabling process. Banerjee argues that empowerment implies fundamental redistribution of power within and between families/societies. It is an externally induced process/mechanism of change towards women’s equality and development. It is a process of equity enhancement and can be achieved only through disempowering some structures, systems and institutions. The process is often selective and uneven. The process is never linear and includes resistance, conflict and accommodation. Here power is used not as a mode of domination but as strength, ability to influence social and political processes, the right to choose and the ability to influence the direction of social change. The outcome of empowerment would then be redistribution of power, whether between nations, classes, castes, races, ethnic groups or genders. This belies the fond hope of many people that women’s empowerment should not disempower men. There can be no denying the fact that if the women of any class, caste or region are to gain greater control over resources and hence decision-making power, then those who traditionally enjoyed such power will have to give up at least some of it. Thus the goal of empowerment is to: challenge subordination and subjugation; and transform the structures, systems and institutions (Shashi S.Narayana, 1998).
In addition, the concept of empowerment of women is indicative of a shift in perspective emphasis from welfare-development to one of development of authoritative decision-making skills. It has been a basic aim of feminism and can be viewed as a carrying forward of developmental paradigms.¹¹ And, women's empowerment is a process of social transformation where women gain control of decision-making over issues, which affect their lives to have access to and control over resources and benefits, and through empowerment, women become an important constituent of the society.¹²

The process of empowerment begins in the mind, from woman's consciousness, from her very beliefs about herself and her rights, capabilities and potential, from her self-image and awareness of how gender as well as other socio-economic and political forces are acting on her; from breaking free of the sense of inferiority which has been imprinted since earliest childhood, from recognizing her strengths, above all, from believing in her innate right to dignity and justice and realizing that it is, she along with her sisters who must assert that right for no one who holds power will give it away willingly.¹³ Through the process of empowerment, women find a 'time and space' of their own, and begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively. They enable women to look at old problems in new ways, analyze their environment and situation, recognize their strengths, alter their self-image, access new kinds of information and knowledge, acquire new skills, and initiate action aimed at gaining greater control over resources of various kinds.¹⁴

Empowerment is thus not merely a change of mind-set, but a visible demonstration of that change which the world around is forced to acknowledge, respond to, and accommodate as best it may. Armed with their growing collective strength, women begin to assert their right to control resources (including their own bodies) and participate equally in decision-making within the family, community and village. As a result, women's empowerment will lead to a world where women and men ensure that resources are utilized not just equitably, but sanely and safely.
The process of empowerment,\textsuperscript{15} therefore is all embracing, because it must address all structures of power. This brings into question theories, which locate any one system or structure as the basis of all power. For instance the claim that economic structures are the basis of powerlessness and inequality. This would seem to imply that in a situation where women are as economically strong, or stronger than men, they would have equal status.

3.5 Parameters of Empowerment

Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making because collective action on specific issues can itself contribute to a sharpening of consciousness as the process of organizing itself involves shared goals and a search for an alternative perspective and strategies. Therefore, the parameters\textsuperscript{16} for women empowerment are:

- Building a positive self-image and self-confidence;
- Developing 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.

3.6 Levels of Empowerment

The levels of women empowerment according to Longwe (1990) could be classified\textsuperscript{17} into five namely, welfare, access, awareness or conscientisation, participation or performance and control and the need to move from the level of welfare to control, is a useful one. ‘Welfare’ is nothing but to improve the living
conditions of women. 'Access' is the possibility to obtain services, products or commodities, and it is one of the indicators of progress in the process of women's development. 'Awareness' or 'Conscientisation' stands for the process of exposing people to the problems, which affect men and women because of discrimination and other societal problems. In women's development conscientisation involves the process by which women analyze and understand the prevalence of gender discrimination. It is a crucial step towards enabling environment. 'Participation' or 'Performance' involves ensuring equitable participation of women in the socio-political and economic processes and structures. In other words, it ensures equal participation of women in development planning, development processes and development programmes. 'Control' means the ability to direct, or to influence events, recognizes women's right to control her destiny, have an equal share in the resources and benefits and expanding the role of women as decision makers in public and private domains, so that they are better able to control their lives. The absence of above, would more clearly address the underlying causes of women's powerlessness and the discrimination they experience in their daily lives.

3.7 Indicators for Women's Empowerment

The indicators for women's empowerment are as follows:

- Women become vocal, articulate and fearlessly self-expressive through their assembly in small groups and start making discussions about the self, within the family and in the group where she belongs.
- Women's knowledge and awareness of their situation, and access to, new kinds of information, knowledge, attitudes and skills.
- Women's ability to speak out and act on oppressive practices and violence against women within the family and outside it, for asserting their views and rightful share.
- Women gain significant confidence because of their role as decision makers, accounts keepers, technically skilled agricultural workers and village engineers, planners of action programmes, trainers, etc.
- Women’s physical mobility increases due to their attendance in meetings, trainings, cultural programmes, studytours, conferences and field action programmes.
- Women often along with their men begin to collectively address the forms of exploitation such as right to minimum wages, right to ownership of land and other family assets in their own names. Thereby women’s economic status improves, leading to higher say and status in family matters.
- Women develop capacities and skills to understand and perceive situations, reflect upon it, critically analyze the situation further and explore possible solutions for the problems posed before them.
- Women put together courage to do the chores taken care of and performed by men so far and learn relevant scientific and mathematical skills (like constructing bunds, handling technical instruments, calculating one’s wages, etc.)
- Women’s formation, of formal or informal groups, for unitedly engage in struggles and action on common concerns and issues.
- Women’s group collectively access resources/schemes/services to meet their needs such as health, nutrition and child care and set up and manage their own services if necessary, e.g. creches and non-formal schools for children, credit and saving schemes.
- Levels of violence, atrocities and oppressive social customs begin to decrease due to her social and economic empowerment.
- Altogether the image of women as a respectable source of strength improves significantly within and outside the family because of the change in women’s self-image from one of subordination and subjugation to one of self-esteem, confidence and equality.
3.8 Aspects of Women Empowerment

Women's issues could be broadly classified into five, all of them relating to the status of women; namely political recognition, access to education, access to employment, legal recognition and cultural recognition. Women need to be empowered in almost all of them; otherwise they will not get their rightful share of the productive resources or participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Besides, as the term "empowerment" is very broad, women's empowerment could be broadly classified into five different aspects such as, political, social, economic, legal and cultural.

The most important aspect of women's empowerment is their active participation in the political process of the country. Gender equality — political and social — is enshrined in the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution together with equality of opportunity to employment and appointment to office. Political equality includes not only the equal right to franchise but also the more important right to gain access to the formal institutionalized centres of power. Therefore, political empowerment of women is nothing but giving women the capacity to influence the decision-making process by integrating them into the political system.

Coming to the social aspect of empowerment of women, nobody could deny the role of education, as it is a powerful instrument since it enables women to gain more knowledge about the outside world, skills, self-image and self-confidence. Education is a major force in redefining women's role and status and it is an important aspect for increasing and bettering the chances of women employability and empowering women to think for themselves, become confident and also develop the capability of recognizing more accurately the area of exploitation. Greater exposure of women to education results in an increased sharing of responsibility within the family, more continuous employment in jobs, lower fertility patterns, and greater participation in social and political activities. Moreover, it opens up an arena in which women can compete with men and prove their identity.
Employment, the base for economic empowerment of women not only provides economic independence but also enables women to move out of their homes, express their ideas, exchange views on their problems and evaluate their position vis-a-vis men in many areas of social life. Economic independence or access to an inherited or self-generated income is considered to be the major means of empowerment of women, as economic independence is the worst form of dependence. However, economic independence may not fully give women the necessary decision-making power and may not even make access to forums of decision-making easy or smooth for them. Even so, the aspect of economic empowerment cannot be minimized.

Laws also empower women because the legal rights of women are of very high order and in certain respects more effective than any other aspect. Laws provide women legal redressal in cases where conciliation fails. The principle of gender equality was accepted in principle by the Constitution. And, it also empowered the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by women as a result of centuries of discrimination and exploitation.

It is not enough if women empower themselves through decision-making, education and employment. There should be social recognition for which there is a need for the aspect of cultural empowerment of women, which is considered to be the basic factor for the overall empowerment of women. Cultural empowerment of women is nothing but men should acknowledge the need for women development and women should dispel their wrong self-perception that they are inferior and should play second fiddle to men.

From the aspects of empowerment, it is understood that empowerment of women is a much wider task to achieve. Therefore, there is a need for the development of all the aspects in a balanced way, otherwise the prospect of
empowerment of women will remain a mere illusion rather than to become a tangible reality. In addition, state patronage and legitimacy were needed to achieve it speedily.

3.9 Empowerment of Women: Ongoing Approaches and Strategies

Women empowerment is fast emerging as an important slogan for the 1990s. This slogan is gradually being integrated with that of participation, advanced so vociferously by many in the late 1970s and 1980s, with the accent of development progress becoming people-centred and equitably distributed. As a result, women's subordinate position has been recognized and the need to improve their 'status' beyond the traditional sphere, became a significant step forward in the rhetoric of international development. It was also recognized that there is a need for equal participation of women and men in every sphere of national life for the purpose of national development and also for the better standard of living.

Gender equality represented by fairer opportunities for women and better access to education, childcare, credit and employment contribute to their development. It is also recognized that investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to achieve their choices is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development of the nation. The goals and commitments of the recent series of global summits provide a powerful new framework and many concrete specifics for concerted action. The Cairo Conference was a challenge to the world to accept that if we are to deal with population issues in a truly serious and meaningful way, it requires the emancipation and empowerment of women. The International Conference on Population and Development [ICPD] was remarkable for the breadth of its focus on the human dimension of population - a recognition that tackling population issues in this context requires simultaneous progress on related issues such as empowerment of women, gender equality and girls' education.
As a result, in India, women were recognized as a separate target group after 1980, and the government began to direct its effort towards mainstreaming of women into the national developmental process. Three major approaches were adopted one after the other by the government towards the development of women viz., the welfare approach, the anti-poverty approach and the equity/equality approach. While the welfarist approach lay stress on the importance of women’s roles as wives and mothers and careers of family welfare, the anti-poverty approach was built on two strategies – need for recognizing women’s participation in development and exposing women’s significant contribution to family income, paid and unpaid work. There was full effort to mobilize poor women and give them economic support through income generating projects and co-operative functioning. The equity/equality approach focusses on women’s actual productive contribution rather than looking at it from the traditional role as wives and mothers. The aim in this approach is to ensure women’s rightful and equal position in society through direct programmes that would enhance women’s activities in both the household as well as market spheres. Thus began the strategy for the empowerment of women in India.

Some of the empowerment mechanisms in India could be identified as follows:

- Literacy and higher education;
- Better health care for herself and her children;
- Higher age at marriage;
- Greater work participation in modernized sector;
- Necessary financial and service support for self-employment;
- Opportunities for higher positions of power;
- Complete knowledge of her rights; and above all
- Self-reliance, self-respect and dignity of being a woman.

The Constitution of India made a deliberate radical departure from the inherited social system. by granting to women equal social and political status. Constitutional equal status meant that every adult female, whatever her social
position, or accomplishments had the opportunity to function as a citizen and individual partner in the task of nation building. With the exception of cultural empowerment of women, the following aspects of women empowerment are given importance such as, full participation of women in democracy (political empowerment); the education of girls (social empowerment); the eradication of gender barriers in employment (economic empowerment); and land rights and legal machinery (legal empowerment). Let us now analyze each aspect of empowerment of women in detail.

3.9.1 Political Empowerment of Women

The political empowerment of women is one of the most important aspects in the overall empowerment of women for it gives women the capacity to influence the decision-making process. The political empowerment of women in India has made considerable strides with only 4.4 per cent women being represented in the first Parliament of 1952-57 to 7.4 per cent in the election of 1996. Women’s representation in the Rajya Sabha has however, shown greater improvement, having increased from 7.7 per cent in 1952 to 15.5 per cent in 1991. Besides the 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions is certainly a revolutionary step towards empowerment of rural women. The Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendments paved the way for the emergence of about one million women as leaders and decision-makers in the rural and urban elected bodies. Of these, 75000 will be Chairpersons in rural areas. This will really empower women politically at the grass-roots level in a revolutionary fashion and it will enable them to take interest at the local level to energize and improve the situation of women in areas like health, education and employment, which is essential to their basic existence. This will also train them for further political assertions in the form of Members of State Legislatures and Parliament. As a result of the system of periodical elections, women even in remote rural areas of the country are now familiar with the elections though not with their mystique.
Despite their vast numerical strength, women occupy a marginalized position in society because of several socio-economic constraints. This has inhibited effective participation of women in political processes and the institutional structure of democracy. Even after five decades of the grant of political equality, statistics have over the years revealed that while there is an acceptable visible manifestation of gender equality at the voter level, gender visibility within the power structures show cause for women concern. According to the Document on Women’s Development (1985) women’s role in political structure had virtually remained unchanged, despite the rapid growth of informal political activity by them.

In general, the women candidates have to cross three hurdles before they could aspire to enter the formal political structures – (a) they should be willing to stand for elections, (b) they should be judged suitable by the party electorate which is the ‘gate-keeper’ of power and (c) they have to be voter friendly. Besides, broad-based political participation of women has been severely limited due to the nexus of traditional factors such as considerations of caste, religion and feudal and family status. Further, the political parties do not favour the nomination of women candidates, as they are not sure of their success. Although the political parties do have a Women’s Wing, few women have access to the inner ring of the party, which is the core of the power structure. Moreover, lumpenisation and musclepower keep the women away. This is true of the Indian political system as well. Majority of the women are illiterate, not politically conscious due to the lack of information and political awareness and they make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of the family. As a result, women were left on the periphery of political process.

However, with the Panchayati Raj institutions getting Constitutional status by way of the Seventy-third Amendment Act, it is hoped that the women will have greater participation in the political process and decision-making capacity as the Act made such a role mandatory and universal in the whole of India. But, it must be remembered that a change cannot be brought about overnight. Women have been
to extend greater affirmative action from the Panchayat level, to the state and national level and political conscious raising and supportive action by women's organizations at the voter level to enhance self-potency and political efficacy. If these measures are followed, political participation of women will open up new vistas of development, which will automatically result in the real political empowerment of women in the society.

3.9.2 Social Empowerment of Women

It is often argued that education is a powerful tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Indeed, the different organs of the United Nations (e.g. UNICEF) and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step in women's equality. It has been reported as a crucial factor for development of women as it not only helps women to gain knowledge but also provides the necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenges of life. It will also enable them to procure a job and supplement the income of the family and achieve social status. Education, especially of women, has a major impact on health and nutrition, and is the key of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover, educated women could play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying the fact that education empowers women.

One of the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote "empowerment" of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a landmark in the approach to women's education. The National Literacy Mission is another step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years by the year 1995. Women's education has assumed special significance in the context of planned development, as education was included in the Sixth Five-Year Plan as a major programme for the development of women. The universalisation of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadis and creches, increasing the number of girls' hostels, women's polytechnics and multi-purpose institutions
and adult education programmes were some of the steps taken to boost women’s education. This is being done with the hope that once illiteracy is removed, other avenues of development get opened automatically.

In spite of these appreciable momentum much headway has not been made till date and women’s education has always been an enigma in India for several reasons. In the year 1901, the status of women’s education was deplorable since it was less than 1 per cent. In 1981, women’s literacy was 24.83 per cent. The 1991 Census report indicates that literacy among women is 39 per cent. Almost a century has gone and in spite of best efforts India had not achieved even 50 per cent literacy among women. There are better educational facilities for women in big cities and towns. But the growth of women’s education in rural areas is very slow. In general, majority of the women is still illiterate, weak, backward and exploited.

Education for a long time was dissociated from the idea of nation building. Its main aim was considered to be transmission of the accumulated wealth of knowledge, impart classical values and to build the character of the individual. It was not viewed as a contributory factor to the development of the nation as we understand it today. Though the aim of education has changed, the perception of women’s education is still backward. A girl child from her childhood is socialized to be a good sister, good wife and good mother and not for a challenging career. She is constantly reminded that her role is limited to home and home management. Even in those families where girl children are given higher education they are encouraged to take up humanities and social sciences and not sciences, medicine or engineering. Though the trend is changing it is very slow.

It is indisputable that education enables a woman to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home, helps her to get status, positive self-image and self-confidence. Even so, these attributes will remain personal to her and cannot be transferred to her sex. The fact that education by itself will not contribute to social status of women has been shown by the Population Crisis Committee’s
(USA) data sheet, which shows that many countries which have high scores on education of women are low on social status of women (HDR, 1990). In Kerala, the very high rate of female literacy has not increased the social status of its women commensurately. True, there have been a general all-round development in Kerala women, especially in their quality of life, level of white collar employment, expectation of life, maternal and infant mortality rates, control of birth, but, in other fields, the women of Kerala are more insecure today than before. Wife burning, dowry death and other crimes against women which were unheard of a few decades ago have now become a general feature like in the rest of India.21 Certainly, by itself, education will not be able to deliver the goods unless it fosters new values — values which expose the inequities against women and which espouse gender justice.

There is a need for encouraging more women to participate in vocational, technical and professional education. Women’s education should be treated as a special priority in all programmes of development. The government can open more places in schools for girls, lessen the financial burdens of education for women, reform curricula and educational system, in order to encourage girls to formulate non-traditional career goals and centralize the educational system to ensure greater equivalence of educational experiences for girls. Besides, education for women must be practical and welladapted to their needs, especially in relation to health, nutrition and legal rights.

3.9.3 Economic Empowerment of Women

Economic independence or access to an inherited or self-generated income is considered to be the major means of empowerment of women. And, the contribution of employment to the improvement of women’s position is largely contributed by the modern sector and they enable women to move out of their homes to an extended plane, express their ideas, exchange their problems and evaluate their position vis-a-vis men in many areas of social life. This would result in an awareness of their
subjected to exploitation for ages and thus cannot break free of all the shackles of illiteracy, poverty and tradition at one stroke. Even today, most of the women are uneducated, have little or no property and live in a tradition-bound society. In such a case, the politically powerful can make them contest elections for their own political gains. Another problem is that women, especially in rural areas, would not come forward to fight the elections. In case, they do come forward, it would be along the patriarchal whip, under the command and guidance of the males, as proxies and signing or stamping on the dotted lines. But it is a fact that a breakthrough has been made.

Gender as a political ideology view women as basically different from men—psychologically, physiologically and often intellectually. Women’s perception of life is a web. Man’s is that of a ladder. Women stress attachment, affiliation, empathy and interdependence. Men emphasize competition, independence, separation and formal rights. Combined with the first-past-the winning post-theory, an inherent weakness of the democratic electoral process, the visibility issue gets further compounded (Shanti, K., 1998).

Gender empowerment strategies under these circumstances require structural systemic change and basic attitudinal and value change. The real empowerment of women requires a thorough going renewal of the political process on a democratic basis. Unless women are equipped with the necessary skill in political decision-making, their increased representation in the local bodies may not alter the existing set up. It is, therefore necessary to sensitize the women in the women’s perspective, not in the narrow feminist sense, but in the sense of honourable co-existence with men for this will enable women to exercise their ‘will’ and advance towards their complete emancipation. This, of course, requires sensitizing men as well, as they are currently the holders of power. Besides the success of the Panchayati Raj institutions largely depends on the collective participation. They are at a take-off point, where the basic indicators are positive and the women who will be elected in the election have a challenging and an onerous task ahead. And, thus there is a need
position in society and an urge to do something about it. Full employment of a woman assures her a better, more enriching and rewarding life and human relationship. The government has taken certain positive steps in full employment of women and payment of equal remuneration to them. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (India) was a major step towards protective legislation and establishing the principles of equality, as it provides for equal remuneration to men and women workers and prevention of discrimination against women in the matter of employment. In addition, to enabling women to stand on their own legs, the Government of India and the Indian States have introduced a number of women-oriented income generation programmes. The recognition of national responsibility towards the economic empowerment of women cannot be anything but to the advantage of women.

But there seems to be a little link between the level of economic development and women’s economic opportunities. There are some major factors, which hinder gainful utilization of female labour force such as, general antipathy towards women’s employment, responsibilities at home, traditional forms of job discrimination, high male unemployment, women’s work and earning being treated as subsidiary to that of man’s absence of facilities such as cheap eating facility, childcare centres and safe transport. In India, the labour force participation of women is very low. As per 1991 Census, the percentage of women in the labour force was 22 against 52 per cent for men. Though women engage in a wider variety of occupations, they are concentrated usually in the unorganized sector, at the lowest rung of the ladder. Lack of organization and unionization makes their bargaining power very weak. Moreover, the unpaid economic activities of women and their contribution through work in the domestic sectors remain unrecorded.

The plight of working women has drawn attention of many welfare institutions and women’s organizations in the recent years. The Panel Document adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women stated: “In order to ensure women the right to work it is especially necessary to eliminate unemployment and all
forms of discrimination, enable them to have access to every profession, ensure them to general and vocational training and to eliminate illiteracy through the establishment of functional literacy”. This statement is quite valid as we cannot view women’s status in the workforce in isolation. As women’s economic participation is related to a variety of variables, cultural values relating to the sexual division of labour, women’s access to education and availability of jobs to women should be taken care of.

One of the major hurdles to the development of employment opportunities for women is the lack of adequate training. Women should have access to productive resources such as land, building, credit, housing and skill training. Supporting service provisions would make women more functional and productive by reducing their drudgery and provide them with more time for employment. Programmes for women, consisting of skill building and skill upgrading can be more fruitful for enhancing their economic status, and make them to have a superior bargaining power as far as employment is concerned. Therefore, it is crucial for raising the female earning power to increase the effective demand for education, health and family planning services, which are necessary for improving the status of women to a great extent.

3.9.4 Legal Empowerment of Women

Laws empower women. They provide legal redressal in cases where conciliation fails. And, it is important machinery at all levels, as it has an ability to sensitize women to fulfill their needs. The concept of gender equality was accepted in principle by the great Indian political leaders of the twentieth century. With the adoption of the Constitution in India, there has been a spate of legislation to protect women and to give them an equal status. The following legislations have been enacted which are women-specific and women-related to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of sati, etc. They are the Hindu Marriage Act
of 1955, the Special Marriage Act of 1954, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act of 1976, the Factories Act of 1948, the Maternity Benefits Act of 1961, the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1986, the establishment of Family Courts in 1984 and the Amendments to Criminal Law in 1983. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act of 1987 have also been passed to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation. The State also imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Legal rights of women in India are of very high order and in certain respects more than what is available for women in other countries. But seldom these laws are followed. Violations are the order of the day than adherence to these laws. For instance, the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act instead of protecting the women penalize her, the others serve to strengthen the state by vesting more and more power with the enforcement machinery. For many of the laws, which reinforce equality between men and women, social acceptance is yet to come. Personal Laws are the laws, which govern marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and adoption. Personal Laws do vary based on the religion practiced. The personal laws governing Hindus has been codified and amended from time to time making it progressive and comprehensive but not the Mohammedan Law, Christian Law and Parsi Law. This has become a legal problem for women of different religions as they are put to differential treatment. As long as there are disparities in the law administered, based on religion, Article 44 of the Constitution which states that the state shall endeavour to secure the citizen a Uniform Civil Code remains a dead letter.

The law, which grants a decree for divorce must also secure for women a measure of economic independence. The cruel treatment of women in the hands of their husbands and their families is because of her total dependence on man, be it
father, husband or son. If things go well then there is no problem but for those who are not so fortunate there must be a way out, other than ending life. Moreover, if dowry harassment, wife battering and child abuse took place in a non-domestic setting it would definitely give rise to legal action or complaint but when set in the domestic arena even law enforcement agencies are reluctant to interfere. Women lack the courage to start proceedings especially when they want the marriage tie to continue. Besides, ‘family’ is the prime place where most of the crimes are committed. Family Courts do play an important role in solving family disputes but their coverage is inadequate. In spite of the fact that legal remedies are available for women, many affected women do not resort to them in view of the time, cost and social image constraints.

Another important area where law could be an important tool of safeguard against exploitation of women is the law relating to wages for workers in the informal sector. Women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers. Despite having ratified International Conventions as are embodied by International Labour Organization (ILO) and having laws such as the Minimum Wages Act, the Contract Labour Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, etc. poor implementation and enforcement has prevented women from benefiting from these legal safeguards. Laws to protect women against violence are proved inadequate as new forms of violence are coming to light which point out that a totally new approach is needed to deal with the situation. Therefore, there has to be a greater emphasis on creating awareness amongst the law enforcement machinery on issues related to human rights and social justice, which have been guaranteed by the Indian Constitution in Indian women.

From the foregoing it is clear that legislation is an important instrument towards social change, but experience has shown that statutory change alone is not adequate. Moreover, legislation in itself has only a limited impact and cannot be carried out in isolation. A change in social attitude, is a must. Legal equality without social or economic equality is meaningless and women have been socially,
morally, economically and physically exploited in the name of tradition, religion or by social sanctions. This should come to an end. Women have been defined by the sex and until this social attitude changes there will be no change in the status of women. Besides awareness and knowledge of women’s rights to equality has to be created not only among women but also in the society at large. Moreover, women should become aware of their legal rights and demand their unbiased implementation. In addition, women must themselves be involved in a much bigger way in the judicial and the law enforcement process as judicial officers, lawyers or police. The constitutional vision of gender justice can be realized only by a set of multiple strategies, which include more affirmative action. Women’s movement, therefore, could play a vital role in such a context and perhaps that could be the most effective instrument in achieving the legal empowerment of women.

3.9.5 Cultural Empowerment of Women

The most basic factor which inhibited women from being empowered till recently was the attitude of society towards a woman’s role and her place in society. These social values and attitudes get reflected in the education and socialization of girls, and in the institutional arrangements of society. Traditionally, a woman’s reproductive role was considered as her primary role and her role as producer secondary, unless as in the low-income classes, economic necessity forced a woman to support the family. Coupled with this was the idealized image of the woman as the one who subordinated self to the family.

Women were socialized into accepting these role definitions, and expectations through stories from mythology, epics and folklore, which glorified women who conformed to the ideal image. Thus, women were conditioned to sacrifice their own goals and ambitions, deny themselves their legitimate space and surrender any resources, which might have contributed to their independence. They were told to always adjust, accept and accommodate. This was hardly conducive to
the development of self-confidence, self-image and initiative or willingness to take risks, characteristics absolutely essential for empowerment.

These values and attitudes also meant that girls were often given less education than boys, and even when girls were educated up to school or beyond, the aspirations of the parents and even of the girls themselves were lower both as to educational attainments and future prospects. For a young girl marriage and children were considered the only life long activity and education was imparted either to make her a better wife and mother or to secure a better husband, since husbands preferred educated wives.

These attitudes reflected too on the courses and curricula offered to women, these were not designed to equip girls with specialized training for a job or career. If employment was at all considered for a woman, it was seen merely as a temporary occupation till marriage. This conditioned not only women’s own aspirations but also judgement of their capacities, choice of occupations and training. It also coloured the attitudes of all such as parents, teachers, heads of schools and training institutions, employers and policy makers.

From the foregoing it is clear that it is not enough if women empower themselves through education, employment and participation in decision-making. There should be cultural empowerment of women. To make this a reality, there should be social recognition, which requires attitudinal change. Freedom is necessary for women. It does not mean breaking away from home and tradition, but it means searching for one’s own identity and making the people around her to accept her as a human person. Moreover, there is a necessity of ‘conscious raising’ or ‘awareness creation’ for the achievement of cultural empowerment of women. This can be done through powerful means of communication, mobilization and organization of both men and women by helping them to think about themselves, identify the oppressive forces working against their improvement and enjoy a feeling of ‘oneness’ and identification with the rest of the members of their group. The
mobilization process could be successfully carried out by the non-governmental organizations working for the development of women. Thus creating awareness among women about their freedom is invaluable. In addition, unless patriarchal values die and principles of justice are enshrined in the minds of each and every individual in the society, it is impossible to reap the fruits of empowerment of women.

3.10 Empowerment of Women: Suggestive Approaches and Strategies

Women’s powerlessness is due to a complex interplay of factors such as historical, social, political, economic, legal and cultural. Both men and women are conditioned from birth to conform to certain stereotypes and roles and thus view themselves and the other sex in these terms. Poor women, by virtue of their gender are considered the ‘poorest of the poor’. A woman has great capacity to work but she does not find proper avenues. There is lack of confidence in her, which is mainly the creation of environment. What is needed today, is to restore the confidence of women in her capacity and to provide a sense of security to her. The problem is a very complicated and comprehensive one. It needs an ‘integrated approach’, tackling the problem by different agencies (Sapru, R.K., 1989). For our convenience it may be broadly divided into three broad categories:

- First, there is a need to create an awareness in the society of the social ills;
- Secondly, the law enforcement agency should be made more effective and suitable to tackle the problem in a right perspective; and
- Finally, to provide socio-economic security to women.

Another approach which could be followed for the empowerment of women is the ‘women’s mobilization approach’. Mobilization24 in general, is a process, which is induced at the attitudinal and behaviour levels in social groups within a society. It is also a function in terms of a given social system and its dynamics.
Mobilization of women in India is a critical social process. It is an organized effort by various sections of women and other non-governmental organizations to initiate change in society at the level of values and institutions. It involves collective action on a sustained basis and is guided by ideological perspectives and group interest and issues. Any analysis of such a social process consists of studying various inter-related social activities, interactions and events as related to ideology and power matrix. The analysis should also look at their linkages with socio-cultural, political and economic changes in communities, region, country and the modern world system. Finally, it must address those endeavours and processes, which have a direct impact upon the patterns of power and resources within household, civil society and the state.

The approach of organizing women and building awareness among women and thereby empowering them should not be viewed as anti-men or leading to disempowerment of men in the target group or in a community. We should be more concerned with new structures and relationships, which redefine the meaning of power. There will be a disempowerment of men in terms of loss of certain traditional rights and changes in the sexual division of labour, particularly within the households. Women cannot be considered empowered if they still carry the age-old burden and men continue to enjoy their traditional right to have all household services provided to them by their women-folk. There will have to be new modalities worked out to share the responsibilities of household work.

One criticism, which is often leveled against this approach of organizing women, is that it is a very slow process and takes much longer than other approaches to make a visible impact. But the women’s mobilization approach is very open-ended and places no boundaries on women’s empowerment. It appears to be a very holistic approach spanning the personal and the political, the local and the national. It seems to believe that empowerment is, whatever women want it to be something which women must define, direct and determine.
There is another approach for the empowerment of women called the 'gender sensitive participatory approach'. By this term, we imply an approach\textsuperscript{25} which is not only participatory but is informed by the belief that the problematic category in women's development is not the women but the socially constructed relationship between men and women, in which women occupy a subordinate position. Women, in such relations, lack control over their labour, mobility, fertility, sexuality and bodies, and do not have rights over property and rights to decision-making. Besides, the development paradigm, which is based on the market mechanism, privatization, liberalization, high technology and environmental degradation, has led to further deterioration of women's position in society. Therefore, struggles towards empowering women need to address the multiple social relations and institutions which oppress women, and simultaneously redefine development from a gender perspective.

The gender sensitive participatory approach also refers to an approach, which recognizes the personal as potential and creates spaces for women to identify and address their strategic gender interests rather than just practical needs. Strategic gender interests challenge the existing gender relations, which maintain women in a sub-position. Examples are challenging the gender-based division of labour, equal property rights, control over fertility and sexuality, etc. Whereas the practical gender needs arise out of acceptance of the existing gender relations such as access to safe drinking water, health care, etc.

Another premise is that for women to fight for their strategic gender interests, it is important that they be organized into collectives and empowered. By women's empowerment one does not imply that women should gain power over themselves. And such power can be derived by multiple sources:

- organization/unity
- confidence building
- awareness
- education
- economic independence
- claiming positions of power
In general, the main approach to the empowering of women can be summarized as follows:

- total approach-development of the person and the community;
- non-violent approach;
- leading role for women and creation of leadership;
- power vested in the people;
- participation of the concerned people;
- systematic planning, organization monitoring and evaluation of programmes by women themselves;
- clear vision and commitment in certain ideology;
- conscientization through education and training;
- helping to develop people's organizations - self-supporting;
- developing grass-roots activists to educate the masses and organize them;
- working on short term goals with a view to broad goals of power to women;
- identification of workers with people in terms of total dedication;
- team work and collective decision-making;
- flexibility to suit to the needs; and
- change in power equation.

Women's development would include not merely material growth, but also, and perhaps more realistically and meaningfully, the blossoming of their intellectual, personnel, emotional, psychological, cultural and even spiritual progress. Therefore, empowerment of women cannot be a static notion; but a dynamic process; its approach is balanced, integrative and holistic, it has common goals; and it is participatory in nature. Today women's concern in all sectors - education and literacy, health and nutrition, training and income generation, legislative and judicial reforms have been flag marked. The challenge lies in converting these concerns into reality. Therefore, strategies for empowering women would have to be sharpened to be effective.
The empowerment strategy should generally follow the following processes:

- Identify the poorest and most oppressed women of a selected geopolitical region – urban or rural.

- Train activists/change agents, who are gender-aware and politically conscious to interact with, mobilize, learn from and raise the consciousness of such women.

- The change agents will help women to create a separate ‘time and space’ for such women to be together as women, rather than as beneficiaries or recipients of welfare of development programmes. They should enable women to transform themselves from an aggregate of individuals into a cohesive collective.

- Facilitate women to collectively question their situation and develop critical thinking; look at themselves and their environment in new ways; develop a positive self-image and recognize their strengths, including existing knowledge and skills; and explode sexist myths and misconceptions.

- To put women in the lead, primacy should be given to the idea of economic and political strength through programmes of collective activities without “ghettoising” women’s issues. It makes a slow start but offers a steady progress of their autonomy with high potential for replication elsewhere.

- There is a definite need to facilitate the formation of women’s non-governmental organization network to play catalytic role in the social transformation and development process and to form a strong collective through which individual and collective problems are identified and prioritized.

- Expand women’s horizons through access to new kinds of information, knowledge and skills, and equip women with the capacity to critically understand the structures of power.

- Enable women to function effectively as a collective, including collective decision-making, action, critical reflection and accountability.
• Enable women to formulate a vision of an alternative society, including alternate models of social and economic relations and alternate development paradigms.

• Acquire empowering skills viz., vocational, managerial, literacy and numeracy, basic data collection skills for conducting their surveys, etc., which build the autonomy and power of poor women.

• Strengthen women to independently struggle for changes in:
  a) their material conditions of existence;
  b) their personal lives; and
  c) their treatment in the public sphere.

• Build federations of women’s collectives at local, regional and national and global levels, through which poor women can continue to challenge power structures and further empower themselves for the well-being of society as a whole.

Thus women's empowerment and subsequent development, as understood contemporaneously, envelopes certain groups of themes which must direct the society for a better tomorrow where equity, social justice and freedom are respected in all walks of the society.

3.11 Conclusion

From the foregoing description of the concept of empowerment, its components, aspects and strategies, it is clear that empowerment of women is a complicated and uphill task. This is so because the existing patriarchal value on which the present gender inequality is built, are firmly established in society and are accepted and legitimized by both men and women as pragmatic and utilitarian. To dislodge them to pave way for egalitarian values will require a root-and-branch change in the social structure. Ironically, this change will have to be introduced by the very holders of these values.
The present measures of empowering women are only palliatives. They are only treating the symptom, not the disease. Only a radical change in the value system, re-establishing the principles of gender equality and gender justice (which find acceptance and respectability from Vedic times in India) will be able to achieve women's equality and ensure honourable co-existence of women with men in society. A new movement in this direction is the need of the hour. In a democracy, this should be initiated at the political level. Activist groups should pressurize political parties to incorporate this value clearly and categorically in their ideology and action programme. Anything less than efforts at value-change will be only exercises in futility.
REFERENCES


6. Ibid.


8. Ibid., p.13.


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., pp.13-14.


