

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

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This study is undertaken to give a voice to the voiceless and visibility to the invisible female workers of the Kerala society.

There can neither be a final conclusion nor a final solution to the eternal problems of rights under law. Yet it is proposed to conclude this present study with a brief resume of the inferences drawn from the foregoing chapters along with a few findings emerging out of the inferences, however tentative these inferences and findings may be.

The preceding chapters have analysed most of the basic problems dealing with women and work in historical perspective and the grave violations of women's rights as human rights in the field of labour. Women's rights are human rights. Despite all the legal protection, starting from the United Nations Charter of Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW and the Indian Constitution, women all over the country undergo subordination and are treated as second class citizens. Kerala, with all the development strategy of the Kerala model of development is not far behind in this.

The women of Kerala, especially women workers, suffer discrimination and inequality. The huge economic output given by the women workers and the violation of their rights as human beings are clearly investigated in this study. Women constituted the major workforce of Kerala, in the past and the present, both in domestic and outside-in formal and informal sector. The historical evolution of women labour in Kerala has been analysed from the Sangam period to that of the 21st century.

To make a micro study of women labour in the informal sector, the female construction workers of Cochin, the ultra modern city in Kerala and its periphery were selected. It is apparent from the analysis made in the foregoing chapters that despite all the legal protection and security, these women workers in the informal sector suffer the highest degree of poverty, deprivation, starvation, low standard of living, low level nutritional availability, lack of drinking water in their vicinity, low wages and all other sorts of violation of rights as human being.

This study has been built upon interviews, archival sources, government reports, census analysis, encompassing the analysis of material realities and various theories of gender and labour. To understand the arena in which the construction workers lived and worked, the structure and the nature of the informal sector and the construction industry have been analysed from a historic perspective. The wealthy classes and big-shots really dominate this arena. Most of the works are sub-contracted, which remains the key to organisation of any construction process. Consequently, only temporary employment is available in the industry. As a result the industry employs a

very large number of workers on a casual basis or contract basis with poor bargaining power. It happens that there are principal employers with massive capital outlay at one end of the complex chain of hierarchical relationship and lakhs of construction workers with a highly insecure life subsistence level on the other end. In between lies a whole hierarchy of intermediaries and contractors and sub-contractors so that there is no link between employer and worker. The invisibility of the worker especially the women labour, has left the women to work in this industry with terms of employment, types of work, housing and living conditions determined by the nature of recruitment¹. The result is the acceptance of low wages, sub-minimal labour conditions and evasion of labour securities and lack of employer-employee relations and lack of legal protection and social securities.

The historical evolution of the idea of human rights from the very old days to the present, its development, interaction with the feminist discourse in the west and in the east, brings forth the historical metamorphosis of the concept of human rights as an inalienable, integral and indivisible right of humanity, irrespective of caste, class and sex. It unfolds the truth that the history of human rights is the history of human struggle. People are born with an entitlement to certain basic rights². The historical analysis of human rights revealed the crucial significance of human rights as the most important document by which human society has taken a qualitative leap forward. Human

¹ Sudha, Kumari (1989) Women Workers in Unorganised Sector in India, *Yojana*, July1-15,p.11.

² Adam, Kuper, Jessica Kuper (ed.) (1996) *Encyclopedia of social change, 2nd Edition*, Routledge, London. p.385

rights represent a new element in the development of mankind and in the life of human society. They signify the end of a period and the beginning of a new era in the international relations. It signifies the absolute prohibition of every kind of discrimination. The principles of equality are borrowed from natural law and different documents of ancient and historical periods and incorporated in the UN charter, at the wake of shocking crimes committed in the Second World War. A further analysis is made on the various documents of human rights like Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and all other documents of importance. India being a party to the UDHR, the Constitutional Assembly tried to shape the Indian Constitution in the light of international human rights documents. The fundamental rights and directive principles together constitute the conscience of the Indian constitution. The formation and implementation of National Human Rights Commission, the part played by the National Vanitha Commission, the Kerala State Vanitha Commission and the State Human Rights Commission are indicative of the importance of protecting the human rights of the people of our country. It is apparent from the analysis of feminist discourse and human rights that the rights of women who form a half of humanity are yet to be achieved and it is necessary to pay sufficient attention for it. The non-realisation of the basic rights of all, affect the vulnerable sections of the society especially women and denies their claims to humanity and consequently they are seen as carriers of lesser rights. It is clearly documented that women are discriminated against and denied their fundamental rights to survival, access to resources and control over their bodies and their produce. The evolutions

of feminist discourse in the West, East, in India and in Kerala are dealt with in detail. In the final analysis, it is established that the process of gender socialisation itself is a violation of basic human rights as it attempts to control women's autonomy and their dependence of thought and action³. From the brief survey of the various feminist schools, it is obvious that the feminist theories are all theories of social change as they are unalterably opposed to conservatism. The political strategies adopted within the movement have been influenced by the different ways in which they conceptualise the condition of the women and the construction of gender identity. The rise and development of women's movements in Kerala reveal that although the large section of women are in a state of ignorance and aloofness, a dominant minority inspired by national, socio-religious, political movements and the peasant struggle supported by the leftist movement and the national awakening, rose to the occasion and created a say or voice in the society and they could lead the society in general.

The history of women labour from ancient past to the modern period in Kerala, clearly depicts the huge economic output given by the fair sex for the survival of humanity. In the past, women constituted the major work force of Kerala both in the domestic sector and outside, i.e, formal and informal sectors. The historical evaluation of women labour in Kerala has revealed that women constituting nearly half of the humanity play a vital role in the economy. Yet our traditional attitude towards women is as second class citizens. From

³ Veena Pooncha (1995) Gender Within The Human Rights Discourse, Research Centre For Women 's Studies. S,N,D,T, Bombay, p.7.

time immemorial women have been working at home, in fields, factories and in many other workplaces. The close scrutiny revealed that all the women are working women. Every adult woman is an occupied labourer employing every moment of her life except perhaps during her hours of sleep. A huge work force of women is employed in cleaning their houses, in collecting usufructs from their own homesteads and doing all the so called petty household work. Though the great potential of these huge sector cannot be underestimated, it is a fact that they are not remunerative in terms of money in the strict sense of the work, labour and occupation. It is found from the empirical studies that the lower caste women were and continues to be the most massive work force in Kerala from time immemorial in the field of agriculture, rubber, tea, coir, cashew, handloom and traditional fishing, construction etc. Now women generally occupy the vast sector of shop-assistants, sales girls, nurses, home-nursing and such other key sectors of the economy not to say the vast population of teachers and clerical staff. Now women also occupy a key role in managerial avenues, political leadership and as elected representatives in the local bodies after the 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution.

It is to be written in golden letters that the massive workforce of women in schools, kintergarden, Anganwadis, Balawadis not only in Kerala or in India, but all over the world, is a spectacular achievement and service of woman who become the moulders of the future generation of human species.

So it is concluded that in one way or the other all women are working women. Though a working woman is an asset to the family and to the society, socially and economically they are of an inferior position in our society. But we

can see that while man spends 78% of his earnings on the family, a woman spends 98% of her earnings on the family.

Despite the higher status of women in human development index and gender development index, a low work participation rate is a fact of life. In Kerala, it highlights the mismatch between HDI and labour market. . It is to be pointed out that the sex-ratio is considered to be a fairly good indicator of women's status. It is proved that wherever the status of women is higher, the Female Labour Participation is higher.⁴ But in the case of Kerala, this is not seen, because women of Kerala show a high degree of dependency. Dependency ratio depicts a significant negative correlation with Female Labour Force Participation.⁵ Low FLPR shows a high dependency ratio. The above analysis further reveals that Lower workforce participation is a result of a complex interaction of social and economic factors in our society. The low female work participation rate and the case of 'missing women'⁶ are the grave realities that our state has to be confronted with.

The occupational distribution of Kerala labour shows the gender division of labour, low wage and inferior status of women labour etc .Women have had to work in fields and factories as well. Their role as wives, mothers and home makers entails a disproportionate amount and a variety of other kinds of work domestic, social, medical,educational,emotional and sexual. The

⁴ Human Development Report (2000) UNO, P.201

⁵ Rajeev Sharma,R.k.Sharma (ed.)(2000)"Women and Work in Urban India: A socioeconomic Analysis" in *Labour and Development* Vol.6,No.1&2, December,,p.53.

⁶ Amartya, Sen (1990) "More than Hundred Million Women are Missing", *New York Review of Books*, 20th December, p.61-66.

harder the conditions, the harder women had to work to maintain their families and create the best environment they could for them. The critical exposition and analysis clearly depicted the huge women labour in informal sector which is 'unregulated and unrecorded' small scale activities that women undertake in order to generate income. A great deal of women's work is informal, due to its reproductive nature, and is invisible in the national economy. The involvement of women in the vast area of informal sector like agriculture, construction, making of bricks, beedi, basket, garment, vending fish and vegetables, and in activities like floriculture, poultry, livestock, tailoring, food processing, coir, cashew, really enrich our economy. It is also to be noted that there is a social stratification of labour among the lower caste women⁷.

Women work from dawn to dusk, but in manpower statistics women's work goes unrecognised, unaccounted and under paid. This happens due to negative attitude towards women prevailing in the society which induces lower wages, gender division of labour and other discriminations. If women development is to be achieved, full and equal weightage and recognition should given to women.

A detailed analysis of historical background of construction industry, its origin and evolutionary growth from feudal period to capitalistic state, discloses the changes in the construction industry ,along with the socio-economic transformation of the state. Structural changes in the economy have put severe constrains on the prospect of female employment at the higher

⁷ Defibring, preparation of coconut leaves, dobbing, making mat etc.

levels and led to a process of casualisation of female labour force. This process of casualisation is more severe in the case of women than men⁸. But it could improve the gender relations in work sector. Women had to struggle hard to be in the same position and to have an equal footing with men.

The space, gender and work in construction site and the prejudices against hiring women explores the fact that a lot of prejudices against women are still alive in the work sector even in this fully literate state of Kerala where trade unions make concerted interventionist actions. But it is distressing to note that majority of the female workers are unaware of the unequal wages, labour laws and their rights as workers.

It is interesting to reveal⁹ the data of skilled work because majority of the female workers are considered to be unskilled workers, but their work demands much skill, dexterity, patience and stamina. They have to undergo repetitive, monotonous work and are underpaid and they lack all the welfare measures and legal facilities. It is proved that they are quite 'skilled' workers in the unskilled category. All of them are denied their right to livelihood, thereby right to life.

The detailed and elaborate analysis¹⁰ brings forth the final result of the empirical analysis and inquiry conducted by the researcher. All the respondents were interviewed with a structured questionnaire with items of

⁸ Jayati Ghosh (1999) 'Globalization and women 's employment in Asia ', in *The Voice of Working Women*, vol.XIX, No.3, May-June, special issue on globalization.9
9. In the Chapter V, p185

¹⁰ In the Chapter VI, p.174

information based on certain variables like economic conditions, working conditions, wages, and discrimination in the work site, domestic sector, in society, the environmental factors, living conditions and other necessities of life like drinking water, sanitation, housing and other human needs and their relations with co-workers, employer and contractor.

The study leads to the inference that women are highly discriminated in this male dominated society. It is crystal clear that there are discriminations based on wages, class, caste, gender etc. and there are violations of rights of women workers in the worksite and in the society. Wages are the most important factor in determining the occupational status of women. A brief time-bound study on the minimum daily wages of women workers has been done. There are a number of cases of violations of the Minimum Wages Act and Equal Remuneration Act in the informal sector by giving lesser wages than men who are doing the same work.¹¹ It is an irony to note that government itself fixed lower wages for women than for their counterparts in the same type of work.

There exists clear-cut division of labour. Certain jobs were given to women and said to be unskilled ones, even though they are really skilled work demanding dexterity, stamina and patience. The rigid gender division of labour is overtly related to a gender ideology based on male bread winner. However the model of male bread winner did not belong to the traditional gender ideology among the lowest caste where every woman was supposed to provide for herself and her children. This gender division of labour can be seen established by

¹¹ Wages given in Appendix III

the minimum wages for male and female workers prescribed by the government itself. It is seen that women were prescribed lower wages than for men in the same kind of job¹², as it is assumed that women were not called upon to bear as much of a burden as men in providing for the family even though fact proved otherwise. Women bear the overwhelming responsibility for the maintenance of their children, so they are compelled to work even for shameful low and unequal wages. Otherwise they have to starve. The daily struggle for survival of their family and children compels them to work in a state of deprivation and questions the very notion of dependent helpless roles of a supplementary earner instead of the 'bread winner'. With a more rigid gender division of labour, the idea of bread winner becomes more pronounced.

Women should not be confined to 'women's jobs' and women's jobs shall not be defined as less skilled and demanding than men's. Women, should have equal chances of training and promotion and equal chances of working overtime and obtaining other perks. If young people and women can earn a living wage as individuals, they are not bound to their relative or husbands by financial need. A man who is no longer the main breadwinner will begin to lose some of his power as father and husband.¹³

Most of the respondents expressed the view that they have to face a lot of problems relating to their family life while engaged in wage employment. They have to look after their kith and kin, do all the domestic chores, without a

¹² Wage rates are given in Appendix III

¹³ Michele, Barret and Mary, McIntosh (1980) *The Family wage. Some problems for socialist and feminist capital class*, No. 11, P. 151

word of approbation and always without any visible monetary gain. The domestic work does not qualify them to be included in the workforce according to the Census definition either. In the case of unmarried workers, they became a source of income to the family members.

Women become the most vulnerable section of workers and are victims of ill-health, though Kerala women are acclaimed to be having higher longevity. The diseases of ill-health and deprivation are anaemia, osteoarthritis, prolapsed uterus, miscarriages, leg pain, back pain, body pain etc. Poor dwelling houses, lack of drinking water in neighbourhood, lack of basic resources also hindered their health. Physical ailments of construction workers are due to heavy work load, exposure to dust and chemicals, accident prone working conditions etc.

The working mothers are suffering in the worksite without any amenities of day care facilities to feed their babies, as breast feeding is the most crucial factor in the physical, mental and emotional growth of a child. Lack of day-care centres are, thus a violation of their right to feed their baby. As main earners of the family, they often come to the worksite soon after the delivery without enough rest and treatment. Besides, all the other welfare measures under Head-Load Workers Act are denied to them.

Women's lack of trade union participation is a clear violation of their right to be organised. The lack of organisation in the informal sector is the root cause of exploitation of women workers. Individually women are not in a position to fight against law and discriminatory wages and exploitative working

conditions as they lack bargaining power. Laws will not be violated if workers are organised. Most of the women workers in the urban sector are members of the trade unions, whereas those working in the rural side and in private sector are not at all aware of bargaining power of the unions. The causes for their inability to participate in the trade union movement are the lack of awareness, household duties, responsibilities of motherhood and antipathy of the male leaders etc.

Along with the breadwinner-mania, men seem to be controlling the very meagre income received by women workers. It is extremely difficult for women to meet the financial stringencies related to food, accommodation, dress, children's education, medicines etc. Here they become vulnerable, marginalised group in the economic front. It is a fact that women's autonomy cannot be enhanced without addressing their economic independence. They are forced to save something for the future emergencies like the illness of the members, expenditure related to marriage etc. Majority of them are indebted to local co-operative societies.

Women workers experience almost every forms of violence as a women in general and as workers in particular. Violence against women workers can be seen divided as social violence, sexual violence, and domestic violence.

Violence against woman is the manifestation of a historically unequal power relationship between men and woman. It is a conditioned response and is not natural or biological. The recorded data¹⁴ of the last decade given by

¹⁴ See Table 6.1 in Chapter VI, page No.182

Central Crime Records Bureau and State Crime Records Bureau shows frightening signals in the relentlessly soaring graph of violence against women. In the olden days violence against women was a result of the prevalent atmosphere of ignorance and feudalism. Today violence against women is an uncontrollable phenomenon which is a direct result of the rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and structural adjustment programmes which are changing the socio-economic scenario of our country. In this land where non-violence has been preached as a way of life for thousands of years, it is shocking to observe the brutal reality of women's existence. If in the olden days women were battered out of ignorance, then why are they still battered in this age of education and enlightenment?

Women are vulnerable to acts of violence in the family, in the community and in the work site. Marital cruelty, dowry murders, child abuse, incest and battering are some of the common forms of violence that women face in the family and the society and even in the worksite.

Denial of social justice to the vulnerable sections of the society is a reality today. These social offences are represented in various forms like dowry, female foeticide, female infanticide, immoral trafficking in women and children for prostitution, child marriage, caste based torture, unequal wages etc. All of them are the outcome of social prejudices. Social violence has a greater impact on society.

Women are considered as a commodity to be enjoyed rather than decent individuals, or colleagues to be honoured. In the male dominated

society, sexual violence takes place as a day to day affair. The victims of the crime are again victimised through court trials with humiliating questions invading their privacy. It is revealed that their dignity is disturbed in the temple of justice itself. Sexual violence at the worksite is inflicted by the contractors, colleagues and their superiors. The lower section of the society, who come out for their livelihood is exploited from all sides.

From the empirical studies, it is clear that female workers are squeezed doubly in the worksite and domestic sector. Male members of the lower section of the society are always drug addicts who demand money from the female workers and on refusal, they are beaten and abused. Their children also become the victims of harassment. Female workers are thereby prone to violence in the domestic sector and suffer from physical and mental ailments. The worst aspect of domestic violence against women is that it receives social sanctity. Neighbours, authorities and even the police hesitate to intervene in cases of domestic violence because they feel that this is an area which is private and inaccessible by the outside world. Since the problem begins with the lower status of women, this has to be changed. Women should be given special opportunities to ensure their educational and economic progress. They should be provided with proper facilities of maternity and child care so that their domestic responsibilities are not neglected during the course of their career advancement.

Some of the workers also complained of marital rape, as they are forced to have sexual relation with their partners when physically exhausted after tedious work. The husband is usually exempted from the criminal liability

for rape. This specific exemption from criminal liability in cases of marital rape is definitely against the principle of equality enshrined in our constitution.¹⁵ A marriage should not be considered as a licence for a husband to forcibly rape his wife, with impunity. Use of force or violence in sexual intercourse is a naked violation of the human rights of women and the principle of gender equality.

Many women accused their husbands of extra marital relations . This is often a pretext for divorce or abandonment.

It is to be pointed that most of the recruits in the construction sector are from the lower strata of the society. Seventy percent of them belonged to the scheduled castes. The women migrants from Tamilnadu also belong to the lower categories. It is to be pointed out that lowest paid jobs are done by the people of the lowest hierarchy of the society, a practice having historical roots in India. By that, the manual, cheap labour of the downtrodden people were exploited by the moneyed class in the society.

Despite the caste differences, they are mingling, eating and working together in the worksite and they have pointed out that caste is nothing to talk about except in the case of marriages.

Despite the progressive land reforms in the state, it is a pity that none of the women workers could own a piece of land in their name. All the land is owned by their husbands or parents. It is a ground reality which cuts across boundaries. The question of possession of land property by women in

¹⁵ Kusum (1993) *Women's March Towards Dignity-Socio-Legal Perspective*, Bombay, pp.130-139

this patriarchal society was raised by Mary Roy. Despite the Supreme Court Verdict¹⁶ in favour of Mary Roy, it is disheartening to point out that even now she is denied her right to property. Then we can imagine the condition of lower class women without any means of livelihood or power.

Trade union leaders were also interviewed to find out the causes of violence at worksite. It is explained that they are not in receipt of any complaints from the woman workers, even though they are fully aware of the problem. Regarding the unequal wages, they are even reluctant to talk about it and they are of the opinion that it is a fact of life recognised by everybody.

From the interactions with the employers, it is understood that they think that women employment would retard the employment chances of men when there is rising unemployment among men. It is also pointed out by the employers that women are less efficient in manual labour than men. So they prefer to hire men rather than women. And said that they will have to provide a lot of facilities if women are employed, even though no such facilities were provided to the women in any of the work sites. The necessary steps to be taken by the employer to safeguard the work environment of women are also noted seriously.

The inquiry concluded with the summation of the problems that female workers are the most victimised ones in the society and the work sector. Poverty, lack of food and scarce job opportunities at their domicile are the reasons for the employment of those women, who become the most exploited

¹⁶ S.C.1011, AIR 1901

marginalised and vulnerable group. The economic output of women in the marginalised, informal sector are unaccounted, unrecognised and underpaid.

It follows from what has been discussed so far that Kerala women are discriminated against in economic, political, social and labour scenario even from the very old days. Kerala society is primarily a male-dominated society. The old societal practises related to dress codes, untouchability, smarthavicharam, pulappedi parappedi and mannappedi were against women. The lower status of womenfolk in Kerala was largely due to the societal stigma that women should be submissive, homely and dutiful. Patriarchal domination is very strong in our society. Gender bias still prevails here.

As regards the women workers in Cochin city certain distinct features noticed by the researcher are that 1) Despite with all the shortcomings, they feel like working somewhere to earn an income and try to be self-sufficient. 2) They are trying to merge with the sophisticated society around them and are more trade union conscious 3) Those who are working under trade unions are more empowered and assertive and are more able to respond to every situation they come across than the other non members. 4) All of them are very much bothered about family planning measures and the use of contraceptives. 5) They prefer to have a hygienic environment and used to go to doctors for treatment. 6) Though they lack redressal forums in their worksites, they are quite aware of women's cell and police station where they seek accessibility.

Even after half a century of freedom, the better half of humanity is denied their right to life. The right to life is the right to livelihood. To realise the right to livelihood, we should have economic means to livelihood. Economic independence is essential to achieve economic democracy without which political democracy is at best incomplete. The right to work with dignity can be achieved through legal action, democratic practice and through changed public perceptions. The right to live with dignity can also be achieved through strengthening the Labour laws, Employment Guarantee Acts, the public distribution system, social security arrangements, land rights etc. If the right to work with dignity is achieved, it would achieve other economic and social rights such as right to education, right to information, and right to health. These economic and social rights complement and reinforce each other. Taken together, they hold the promise of radical change in democratic politics and political economy. A violence free existence is the birthright of every woman.

Therefore in view of the findings and conclusions, it is suggested to improve the socio-economic and environmental problems of the workers in the informal sector as a whole and women workers in particular. Thereby the women workers can achieve their right to life, that is, right to livelihood with decency and decorum.

The Minimum Wage legislation and Equal Remuneration Act are to be implemented with all sincerity in the informal sector. The work load carried out by women must be according to the rules and regulations as per Labour Act.¹⁷ Social security and medical facilities for women workers should be

¹⁷ Given in Appendix IV

ensured. The employers are to be responsibility for of maintaining day-care centres at every worksite disregarding the number of women workers. Maternity benefits should be strictly enforced in the case of delivery and miscarriage. Basic amenities like sufficient supply of wholesome drinking water at convenient places, first-aid facilities, adequate washing, latrine and urinal facilities separately for use of men and women, are required to be provided with, by every contractor.

There should be special provision for loans from banks to women workers in the informal sector. Unorganised workers should be given recognition and job security.

For improving their skill and efficiency, there should be some provision for skill upgradation and therefore training and orientation. Skilled and experienced women workers should be promoted as masons or 'maistrys'. Technical and advanced mechanised help should be provided to prevent and reduce hazardous work..

Women workers should be provided with awareness creating training programmes so as to improve their consciousness of women's rights and responsibilities and make them responsible citizens of the country. The government should legislate and practice strict laws to punish those who violate the rights of women and exploit them physically, sexually and mentally.

The Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act,1986 should be enforced strictly to save women and children from trafficking which has become the recent profitable business, especially associated with tourism.

Local Panchayats and corporations should be empowered to act independently or in cooperation with women's organisations to intervene in cases of domestic violence. It is essential to organise the much discussed Jagratha Samiti soon in all local bodies.

The civil rights of women should receive special attention under the constitution so that they can get protection under the laws of the land with respect to their life, security and person. Specific interventions under this could include all women police stations where women could be encouraged to come forward and register their ordinary and extraordinary complaints. Government should institute a national plan of action to deal with various aspects of this problem in a holistic and integrated manner. Inter-sectoral cooperation can be sought by involving the different departments of Human Resource Development, Health & Family Welfare, Non-formal Education and the Ministry of Law & Justice, Social Welfare Boards etc.

Apart from these specific measures, the Government has to carry out a sustained and long term programme of awareness generation which is directed at bringing about attitudinal change and the removal of gender bias. The community should be sensitized to condemn all acts of violence against women and girls. This can become possible only when the status of women receives grace and dignity. We should try to eliminate the subtle forms of violence which are perpetrated against women in the name of custom, tradition or religion.

Local women's organisation can create an atmosphere of awareness in the colonies or localities where they are active. Ayalkootams of Kerala villages need to be strengthened and rural women can be empowered through this. Regular meetings of the Mahila samajams should be organised with the specific objective of raising awareness about violence against women, legal rights of women and recourse or redress which can be obtained in process of law. There is tremendous strength in organisation. The mere fact that a woman has the support of her social group creates fear in the minds of violent husbands or in-laws. They know that at the next meeting she is going to express her feelings to her support group and thus feel obliged to maintain decorous relations. Awareness should be brought about that 'personal is political' This will give a violence free existence to every women in the society.

Specific measures are needed to support women in the invisible income generating work like cultivation for home consumption, animal husbandry etc. Campaigns to question the myth of the non working women and the notions of the girl child as a burden and the prevailing son preference need to be undertaken on an urgent basis.

The greatest revolution in a country is the one that affects the status and living conditions of its women.¹⁸ Only by organizing women workers, we can link all women with the pride of being a woman and especially a working woman. It is better to help them to join all the hands together to find the hidden united strength in them. Time is up to motivate them to rise up as a phoenix from her own helplessness to overcome all their difficulties.

¹⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru quoted by Padmini Sen Gupta (1974) The story of women in India, New Delhi P.65

The right to be human is the basic need of the hour. The women in our society should be empowered to declare, 'I am a human being and nothing pertaining to a human is alien to me'¹⁹ and "the still sad music of humanity" is to be heard by those who wield power and command wealth. Democracy, secularism and national unity of our country can be accomplished only by giving justice and strength to the better half of humanity. Therefore a consistent attempt is required to improve women's work status, education, health and nutrition, employment, personal and family relations, and bring them to the main stream at par with man, so as to obtain the objective of Gender Equality.



¹⁹ Karl, Marx, (1872) quoted by Justice V.R. Krishna, Iyer (1999) The Dialectics and Dynamics of Human Rights in India, Eastern Law House, Calcutta, p.5