Chapter 2

Tracing the Literature on Education and Employment

Education and work are seen as elements which enable individuals to realize their capabilities. It is perceived to be the means for moving up in the social ladder. Education enhances the ability of an individual to survive by producing the means for survival. Dreze and Sen (2002) term literacy as an essential tool of self-defense, participation and empowerment. However, the ability of individuals is often restricted by their location in the society. This location can either be defined by the individual’s race, class, caste or gender in isolation or by the intersection of any or all of these factors. Gender based divisions and inequalities are pervasive across cultures. Literature suggests that gender roles are a part of social learning, which starts in the family and is reinforced by education and training systems, media, religion and other institutions of society. Gender roles are "socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women" (Anselmi and Law 1998). However these prescriptions are hierarchical relations of power between women and men that tend to disadvantage women. These gender hierarchies are socially determined relations, culturally based, and are subject to change over time. They can be seen in a range of gendered practices, such as the division of labour and resources, and gendered ideologies, such as ideas of acceptable behaviour for women and men.

Gender relations cannot be viewed as constant. In the past century, gender relations have undergone tremendous changes. As Loutfi 2002 says that in past 100 years women’s attainment of human rights is ‘dramatic and pervasive’. Along with the constant change in roles of men and women transformation in family, society, politics, culture and economics has also been
experienced. It is however difficult to establish a cause and effect relation between gender relations and social and economic systems. The impact of change in historical circumstances on gender and vice versa will have to be taken into account while studying the location of gender and gender patterning of education, work, economy, migration and technology.

Most of the societies organise themselves in similar manner, where all work is divided by the gender of the individual. Most often tasks are exclusively distributed among men and women. Even though some tasks are engaged in by both the sexes, gender division of labour remains the predominant division (Mackintosh, 1981). Division of labour refers to the differentiation and distribution of tasks involved in producing goods and services. Gender based division of labour is prevalent in both paid work in labour market and unpaid work. However, this division is not constant and changes over time in society. To gain an understanding of how work, education, economic and technological changes intersect with each other and their interplay with gender; the chapter is divided into 4 sections chronologically: pre independence, post-independence till early 1 70’s, mid 1 70’s to early 1 0’s and post-liberalisation. These periods were marked with an evolving understanding of women’s education and work and each phase is distinguished by a paradigm shift and also noteworthy research studies contributing to that understanding.

2.1 Pre Independence:

In India, education of women is perceived as an instrument for changing their subordinated status in society by social reformers, revivalists as well as liberals. However, each of them had different ideological orientations. Women’s education was seen by cultural revivalists as a means of strengthening traditional Indian culture and values to resist westernization. The liberal social
reformers advocated limited education for girls to improve their traditional roles within the patriarchal family. The social reform movement opened up access to schooling for girls and women from the upper castes without envisaging greater role in public life. Even though the early women’s movement emphasised on the need to promote education for women, largely the function of education was perceived to strengthen their existing roles within the patriarchal structures.

The history of the women’s movement in India can be traced back to the social reform movement in the early 19th century that attempted to improve the conditions and status of women, particularly those from higher castes. Social reformers challenged the traditional subordination of Hindu women and gave them dignity and status, within the framework of Hindu revivalism (Desai 1977). They continued to emphasise the patriarchal ideals of Hindu women as self-sacrificing, selfless, and submissive wives and mothers. The basic premise of the social reform movement was that women were oppressed because of social customs and traditions, such as child marriage, sati, purdah (physical seclusion) and lack of education. Only a few progressive thinkers, such as Jyotiba Phule and Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar, perceived oppression of women as a traditional instrument for maintaining social inequality and the dominance of high castes in Indian society (Mazumdar and Sharma 1979).

Women’s education was seen essentially as a means of strengthening traditional Indian culture and values to resist westernization. The liberal social reformers advocated limited education for girls to make them enlightened companions for the emergent class of educated men from upper castes and efficient mothers. Thus, education for women was promoted to improve their
traditional roles within the patriarchal family. Social reformers neither envisaged women’s education as a means to equip them for playing a wider role in society nor to question the patriarchal oppression. Hence, the social reform movement opened up access to schooling for girls and women from the upper castes but the differences in access to the kinds and levels of knowledge remained throughout the colonial period. The social reformers along with the missionaries paved the way for the development of education for women in the early nineteenth century and provided impetus to the emergence of a group of educated women who later promoted the early women’s movement Gandhi and Shah 1 1 .

The Nationalist Movement paved way for women’s legal rights in social, economic and political life. In order to broaden the political base of the nationalist struggle women were accepted as part of the public life and it opened up opportunities for participation in the process of national development (Mazumdar and Sharma 1979). This also led to the redefinition of gender roles. Gandhi who led the national movement, viewed women as the oppressed group and opposed social customs like early marriage, dowry, purdah, etc. that subordinated them. His understanding was based on the Hindu ideology and liberal Western ideology of equality in the public sphere and not on any structural analysis of the origin and nature of gender subordination (Patel 1988). Hence, Gandhi reaffirmed their traditional role within the patriarchal structure and did not promote women’s productive role within the family or the economy.

The establishment of Indian Women’s Association 1 17 and All-India Women’s Conference (1927) for mobilizing women for advancing their status through education, social reform and politics played an important role in demanding the political and legal rights (Shah 1984).
However, these organisations were predominantly formed by upper and middle class and caste and thus they were not able to mobilize the rural masses against the oppressive patriarchal structures. They did not question the existing patriarchal system and confirmed with the view that education enables women to become better wives and mothers. It is imperative to acknowledge that the social reform movement and women’s movement were concerned only with the upper and middle class women where women were not allowed to work in public domain. However, women have always engaged in household chores, taking care of the elderly and children in the family and worked in the fields and small scale home based industry. The nature of work they would engage in was determined by their caste and class. Although the communist movement was engaged in organising women workers on a small scale since the colonial period, its influence on the early women’s movement was very limited because gender issues were subordinated within its broader agenda of class struggle (Chakravarty, 1980). Few studies were undertaken by the British administrators and scholars to understand the impact of industrialisation on women. Curgel (1923) studied the effect of industrial work on the health of women workers in Bengal industries. Curgel’s monograph documents the views of employers and managers regarding the social conditions affecting the welfare of women workers. Kelman (1923) also undertook a study to understand the condition of Indian women in modern industry. He found that women working in several industries like jute and cotton were discriminated against regarding wages and educational facilities.

Several studies, during this period, on women’s education mapped the education of women since the ancient times and current state of education and efforts towards the development of education for women. Most studies were conducted to document the current status of women’s education
and the efforts needed to improve it. Some authors like Howell (1868) advocated for increasing the age of girls up to 10-11 years for attaining education. Others like Yaseen (1917) and Chapman (1939) analysed the available data on literacy among women and drew attention to the neglected state of women’s education. They suggested ways of improving education for girls by training the teachers and greater interest of the government. Others like Bose (1921) have compared the education of women in ancient times and in modern times. He concluded that modern education system for women gives them more freedom of choice in the field of education.

The concept of education as a prerequisite for women’s equality was the first demand of the early women’s movement that developed during the 1920s and 1930s. The first All-India Women’s Conference in 1927 emphasised the need for legal rights to deal with obstacles in promoting education for women and condemned the practice of early marriage as it interfered with women’s education. Mazumdar, 1977. However, education for women was perceived essentially as strengthening their roles within the dominant ideological framework of social reformers and nationalists. Due to the elitist nature of the early women’s movement, it hardly paid any attention to the question of female education among lower castes and Muslims. Even though in the historical context of colonialism some changes started emerging and contradictions were introduced into the existing structure it did not undergo any substantial change and was not necessarily weakened (Liddle and Joshi, 1985).

The nationalist movement laid the foundation of women’s equality and provided some legal rights in social, economic and political spheres for women. Acceptance of the equality principle
by the constitution of India following independence broadened the roles that women needed to play in society as citizens and opened up new avenues for women through education. However, the ambivalence between the traditional view based on the sharp demarcation of the public and private roles of men and women continued in educational policy even after independence.

The Indian Nationalist Movement seems to have followed the functionalist school of thought which was on an ascent during the 19th century and was an important intellectual arm that developed ‘modernization’ as social response for industrialisation to find roots and flourish. Functionalists see the social world as "objectively real," as observable with such techniques as social surveys and interviews. They believe that rules and regulations and values set the guidelines and norms for social behaviour. The institutions of society such as family, religion, the economy, educational and political systems, are major aspects of the social structure. The theory is based around key concepts like - society is a system which is a collection of interdependent parts, with a tendency to maintain equilibrium. There are functional requirements that must be met in a society for its survival such as reproduction of the population (Holmwood, 2005). The functionalist approach towards education is guided by the functions of education for society and relationship between education and other parts of social system. Emile Durkheim saw the major function of education as the transmission of society’s norms and values. He maintained that the survival of a society is based on a degree of homogeneity. Education reinforces this homogeneity by instilling in the child essential similarities which collective life demands. These ‘essential similarities’ lead to cooperation, social solidarity thus making social life possible (Giddens, 1972).
Durkheim argued that education teaches individuals specific skills necessary for their future occupations. This function is particularly important in industrial society with its increasingly complex and specialised division of labour. Durkheim (1933) argued that as specialisation increases people are increasingly separated, values and interests become different, norms are varied, and subcultures (both work-related and social-related) are formed. He recognised that the division of labour gave rise to a distinct type of social order, or solidarity which he calls organic solidarity. Organic solidarity is defined as social order built on the interdependence of people in society. People are dependent on others for their survival and are forced to perform distinct and specialised tasks. Durkheim saw that there is high interdependence and survival is difficult without one another in a highly specialised modern society.

Like Durkheim, Talcott Parsons (1937) argues that the school represents society in miniature. Modern industrial society is increasingly based on achievement and on meritocratic principles which apply to all its members. By reflecting the operation of society as a whole, the school prepares young people for their adult roles. Parsons argues that after primary socialisation within the family, the school takes over as the focal socialising agency and acts as a bridge between the family and society. As part of this process, schools socialise young people into the basic values of society - the value of achievement and the value of equality of opportunity. These values have important functions as advanced industrial society requires a highly motivated, achievement-oriented work-force. Parsons sees the educational system as an important mechanism for the selection of individuals for their future role in society.
Kingsley Davis & Mick Moore (1945) interpret education as a means to achieve status according to an individual’s capacities and qualifications. According to them education enables people to be placed in right occupations and enables them to realize their potential talents, capabilities and efficiencies. They see education as a means of role allocation, but they link the educational system more directly with the system of social stratification. They suggest that social stratification is a mechanism for ensuring that people are selected for important positions on the basis of their merit and performance and high rewards act as incentives are attached to those positions. This will also ensure that all will compete for the positions and the most talented will get selected. The education system is an important part of this process. According to Davis, it is the ‘proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their capacities’. Thus the educational system classifies individuals in terms of their talents and abilities. It rewards the most talented with high qualifications, which in turn provide entry to those occupations which are functionally most important to society. The focus was on maintaining the status quo in the social system.

Like Durkheim, Parsons fails to give adequate consideration to the possibility that the values transmitted by the educational system may be those of a ruling minority rather than of society as a whole. They have been criticized for supporting the transmission of values of the ruling class. They have been accused of ignoring the embedded hierarchies in the social structures and not taking into account the exploitative nature of the social relations. Davis and Moore faced criticisms with respect to the relationship between education and social stratification as it was felt that the relationship between academic credentials and occupational reward is not particularly close. There is considerable doubt about the proposition that the educational system
grades people in terms of ability. In particular, it has been argued that intelligence has little effect upon educational attainment. They have also not taken into consideration the evidence that influence of social stratification largely prevents the educational system from efficiently grading individuals in terms of ability.

The liberal feminists argued for equal educational opportunities, employment opportunities, gaining property rights and also voting rights. They believed that education addresses the inequalities and equal educational opportunities will translate into equal opportunities for women (Wollstonecraft, 1989; Friedan, 1963). They sought to integrate women in the process of development by encouraging women to fulfil their potentials and give them equal opportunities. Liberal feminists perceived unequal educational opportunities as the reason for women’s lower status in division of labour. They argued that women’s low capacity is a result of limited educational opportunities and is responsible for their low status in the labour market. They perceived state as a neutral entity which should ensure that both men and women have equal opportunities to realize their potential. They have been critiqued for ignoring the inequalities inbuilt in the social and economic systems. The liberals failed to recognise that women are in a disadvantageous position owing to the social construction of gender within the patriarchal and capitalist structure (Humm, 1995; Andermahr et.al., 1997).

2.2 Post Independence till early 1970’s

All this while, the colonial forms of capitalism and industrialisation seem to have had a negative impact on women and exacerbating the gender based division of labour. With mechanisation of production, the value of women’s labour was reduced, thus forcing many young women to
migrate to towns and cities to join the labour force in urban workshops and factories or in domestic service.

During this period, the "second-wave" of the Feminist Movement in the United States also contributed to the gradual change in perspective towards women, education and work. Whereas first-wave feminism focused mainly on voting rights and property rights, second-wave feminism addressed a wide range of issues, including inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and reproductive rights. The second wave feminism came in as a response to the late 1940s post-war boom, an era characterized by an unprecedented economic growth in the wake of capitalism. The socio-economic model favoured development of middle-class, but also an era marked by a consistent effort to re-establish pre-war patriarchal social trends. The renewed domesticity of women, move to family-oriented suburbs, and the ideal of companionate marriages was evident after World War II (Kent, 1993; Jones, 2000). In her well known work ‘The Second Sex’ Simone de Beauvoir (1949) examined the notion of women being perceived as "other" in the patriarchal society. She observed that male-centered ideology was accepted as a norm and enforced by the ongoing development of myths, and that women’s reproductive capability -getting pregnant, lactating, and menstruating is not a valid reason or explanation to place them as the "second sex". Betty Friedan objected to the mainstream media image of women, stating that placing women at home limited their possibilities, horizons, and was a mere waste of talent and potential (Epstein, 1988). This wave of feminism helped to educate women and allowed them to see their personal

3 http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/647122/womens-movement

4 Betty Friedan’s work ‘The Feminine Mystique’ in 1963 as referred to in Epstein (1988)
lives as politicized and reflective of the sexist structure of power and gave them the consciousness to challenge the popular images of women in the prevalent culture.

The legal changes which took place were significant to pave way for women’s involvement in public life. Abortion was legalized and birth control pills were made available in 1961. The movement grew with legal victories such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, 1963 found that discrimination against women in every aspect of American life is pervasive and outlined plans to achieve equality. Specific recommendations for women in the workplace included fair hiring practices, paid maternity leave, and affordable child care.

During this period also the functionalist school continued to see education as a means to achieve personal goals. In his article ‘Investment in Human Capital’, Schultz argued that knowledge and skill are a form of capital and there is a direct link between an increase in investment in human capital and increase in workers earnings. He compared acquiring knowledge and skills with means of production and human capital must focus on supporting individuals in acquiring education as it affects one’s ability to do productive work. He was criticized for serving the needs of the capitalist and the ruling class. The human capital theory did not take into consideration the bias in the system and put the onus of achievement on the individual. By this time, the functionalist approach was being questioned for not being able to consider social realities. Coleman (1966) conducted a study to understand to what extent schools help in removing social inequalities with which children come to school. He cast serious doubts
on schools ability to eradicate racial and class inequalities and dismissed the notion that schools act as an equalizer of inequalities in opportunities.

After independence when equality was embraced by the Indian Constitution, women’s education gained impetus. However, the social roles of men and women remained unchallenged. In the initial period after independence the research studies on girl’s education focused on factors for slow progress and backwardness of education for women. In India exposure to western education and ideas through missionaries during the colonial rule and participation of women in the nationalist movement gave them critical consciousness about their rights and role in public life (Swaminathan, 2007).

Following independence in 1947, the state was committed to the constitutional principle of equality of women and rejected the colonial educational policy of differentiated curricula between men and women. The concept of women's development in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was mainly welfare oriented. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), set up in 1953, undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector. In the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) women were organised into Mahila Mandals to act as focal points at the grass-root levels for the development of women. The National Committee on Women’s Education during 1958–1959, recommended common curricula for girls and boys. The Committee on Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls (1964) also rejected the curricular differentiation on the basis of gender and even suggested the inclusion of home science in the core curriculum for boys and girls in elementary schools to counteract traditional stereotypes regarding feminine and masculine tasks Government of India l . These
recommendations were also endorsed by the Educational Commission (1966). The Third, Fourth and other Interim Plans (1961-74) accorded high priority to education of women. Measures to improve maternal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children and nursing and expectant mothers were also introduced. However, the basic assumption regarding the primary roles of women as housewives and mothers remained in the educational policy until the late 1970s. In spite of the rejection of the policy of differentiated curricula on the basis of gender, the practice of different curricula for girls and boys continued at the institutional level in many states.

Even though the state made provisions for women’s education without any inherent discrimination, education of girls is characterised by forced withdrawal from the education system to take up wider responsibilities at home. Also the secondary level education for girls was insufficient and the state did not take enough measures to provide for high schools for girls. The 3rd five year plan (1961-66) took into consideration the huge gap which existed in the number of girls and boys attending school. Measures were taken to encourage more women teachers, education for adult women, incentives like attendance prize and scholarships and other measures to increase the number of girls enrolled.

This period saw emergence of literature on education for women and also on women as workers. Several studies were conducted to understand role of education in improving women’s status in the society. The body of knowledge on women workers was guided by role theory and it focused largely on issues of role conflict for working women.
Most studies on education and women continued to either glorify the status of women and their access to education since vedic period, in order to strengthen their argument for women’s education. Most of them argued that women in vedic period had access to education and they were trained into an array of field like music, dance, even military education (Chaudhari, 1953; Altekar, 1965; Basu, 1971). This was the period when the government at the centre and the state started paying more attention and organised seminars on women’s education – primary, secondary, vocational training, adult education. Research on curricula for girls was also analysed and the studies depicted how difference in curricula for girls and boys had no scientific basis, rather it showed the social and cultural bias of the system (Ministry of education, 1964; Ahuja, 19715).

In the decade of 1960 and 70 several studies explored the cause and effect relationship between education and employment of women and changing family dynamics. The studies on women and work in India have analysed women’s work in the context of family and mainly looked into the reasons and consequences of change in family type and composition. Women’s work and its impact on the family, changing family structures, role conflict and change of status for women have been studied extensively in the past. Devanandan (1962) points out in his study how increase in age at marriage of girls lead to maladjustment and made it difficult for the girls to adjust in a joint family. In another study, the author highlights the inconsistency between the two roles of modern educated Indian woman based on a sample of unmarried girl students of Punjab University (Mahajan, 1966). The study concludes that the girls themselves are not sure of their capabilities of handling their contradictory roles at different stages of their lives. Hate’s 1969)

5 Referred to in Chapter 2- Review Of Related Literature
http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/3835/10/10_chapter%202.pdf downloaded on 21February 2008
series of studies examining women’s status in post-independence India establishes that working mothers experience role conflict and live with a feeling of guilt. Kapur (1970) also analysed the maladjustments in the marriages of working women and showed that working women are influenced by egalitarian ethos in a traditionally patriarchal society leading to conflict. She suggests that these conflicts can be resolved if there is change in attitude of women and family members and also change in family structure. Studies looked into factors leading to role conflict and conflict in marriage, problems faced by working women and coping with multiple roles (Patil, 1972; Singh, 1972). The changing family pattern in India was associated with rapid urbanization, industrialisation and change in status of women. Empirical studies of that period confirm change in opinions related to whose responsibility it is to earn and to manage budgets. Educated middle class women opined that the economic responsibility has to be shared; however they did not subscribe to the idea of sharing responsibility for child rearing and other household chores in the transitional period (Rao, 1965). The understanding that western thought was influencing Indian women, thus giving them opportunities for education and employment was welcomed, however fear of breaking the existent social structures persisted. Also the segregation of women’s role within family and in public domain was seen as contradictory. The onus of change and adjustment both seemed to be on the women and most of these studies emphasised the need for the working women to adjust to her multiple roles. Most of these studies did not take into account the structural inequalities and did not see the need for family and society to change their attitude towards the working women.

Several other authors in their studies explored the world of working women and the impact of it on their lives along with the problems they face. Desai’s study of women in small scale
industries compared employed Indian women with their American and Japanese counterparts working in small scale industry like glass industry, potteries, paper industry, plastic industry, bicycle and other automobile industry etc. The study points out the need of training programmes in management and mechanisation of industry for Indian women. The importance of women’s cooperatives is emphasised for enabling the women in contributing to the economy. Menon (1964) discussed the problems and hostility which the woman faces at work place and home. In workplace she is a victim of subtle and often open hostility and at home she is disapproved by the older generations and is bound by tradition. In an article Mehta (1982) explored the world of educated professional women who were making breakthrough in the field of law, journalism and other technical and technological fields. The author stresses the new problems which arise because of the ‘several inconsistencies’ like women leaving job due to their marital status, issues of personal security and other such issues. Meher (1971) explored the discrimination which exists between men and women in employment situation in India. The paper on women workers focuses on the problems of inadequate training facilities, job opportunities and difference in wages in India, USSR, USA and UK. In this context the author analyses the steps taken by international organisations like ILO and Indian organisation like All India Women’s Conference in promoting vocational training and better facilities for educated trained women. By the end of this phase, women’s presence in the public domain started getting acknowledged and recognised.

2.3 Mid 1970’s till early 1990’s

The trend which started in late 0’s, of challenging inherent social inequalities vis-à-vis women, continued. The links between economic and social justice started emerging and women were seen as tools for the development of the nation. This resulted in greater attention being paid to
women’s issues especially in areas of food and population. In the 70’s within the broader institutionalized field of modernization and development and the feminist movement in the west, the concept of women in development emerged. The target of development programmes was poverty and to curb the growing populations which was viewed as threatening to the security of the world. In order to curb the attraction towards ‘communism’ in the post colonial societies, the western world wanted to ‘modernize’ these societies. Modernization meant developing the productive forces and transforming the society into growth oriented societies based on the logic of science and reasoning. This agenda of ‘modernization’ as defined by the west, was also pushed by institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UN agencies and programmes which believed in the value of a planned, interventionist approach for growth and national development.

Education and employment were hailed as a means to achieve the development goals. It enabled individuals to make informed choices, provided them with skills, new attitudes and perceptions. Colclough (1982) explained that education not only increase the cognitive skills of an individual, but also has an impact on non-cognitive abilities like change in ideas, attitudes and perceptions, thus increasing the economic benefits.

The Women’s Liberation Movement in India also expanded the critique of the division of labour that kept women in segregated jobs and on low pay into a consideration of the division of labour in the family, of sexuality and the division between the public-political and the personal and private-political. The women’s movement made an attempt to study the oppressive aspects of women’s lives such as rape and violence, differential wages, poor focus in development
programmes and taboo subjects such as sexuality and developed a body of theoretical work that attempts to redefine the whole arena of politics. This was the period when the invisible women started gaining visibility in the public domain with an emphasis on their contribution as workers and mothers.

The period of 1 70’s had also witnessed the enormous focus on the population control through family planning programme. There was a growing emphasis on the threat of growing population and need of family planning. In keeping with Enke’s 1 : 1 observation regarding cost benefit analysis of the family planning methods versus the developmental aid dollar spent on preventing births added one hundred times more to income per head in the developing world than it would in other forms of aid women were brought into the policy process on gender specific terms – as housewives, mothers, and ‘at-risk’ reproducers. Women were targeted through welfare schemes like investments in nutrition education, home economics and family planning thus emphasizing the ‘reproductive’ role of women in narrow terms, thus undermining their potential. Women’s fertility was linked with other parameters like education, employment, access to health, child care, maternal and child mortality and other development indicators.

In the anti-poverty approach, the new visibility of women’s poor positions around the world was connected to under development but not to subordination. The basic needs of the family were in focus rather than the unequal access to resources which lead to, for example lack of clean water being seen as a women’s problem.
Esther Boserup’s work on Women’s role in economic development challenged the assumptions of female domesticity and argued that various colonial and post-colonial governments had systematically bypassed women in diffusion of new technologies, extension services and other productive inputs because of their misconceptions of what women did. Women were recognised as economic actors and contributing to development process. She challenged the assumption that the benefits of development would automatically trickle down to the poor. She pointed out that women’s declining status is a clear indication that the few opportunities available to women in modern sector meant that they were restricted largely to the subsistence and informal sectors.

In the early seventies there was a gradual shift in the approach from ‘welfare’ to ‘development’, which started recognising women as important participants of the developmental process. The shift which took place in the international development thought affected the national plans too. India’s participation in international UN conferences on Women helped to alter the approach. In 1971, in response to a request from the United Nations, the government of India appointed a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) to examine all questions relating to the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country.

The comprehensive report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Towards Equality, highlighted that instead of changing social values and attitudes regarding women’s roles, the educational system had contributed to strengthening and perpetuating traditional ideas of women’s subordination through the curricula, the classification of subjects on the basis of sex.
and the unwritten code of conduct enforced on their pupils. It was pointed out that economic growth had suffered because women's role in the economy had been neglected and because their capabilities were neither fully developed nor utilized; the failure to provide them with career and employment-oriented education was particularly blamed. With illustrations of successes and failures in the development effort, it was convincingly shown that the involvement of women, both as paid functionaries and as volunteers, at different levels, is critical to the success of the country's population control, health care and community development programmes. It was underlined that women must be urgently equipped with the capabilities required for them to take up these new responsibilities. These revelations and recommendations gave birth to the concept of women as "partners" in development and took the issue of their education to a new threshold.

Women were no longer viewed as targets of welfare policies but as critical groups for development. This was reflected in the 6th Five Year Plan (1980-85) where strategies for women's employment & economic independence, education, health care and family planning and the creation of a supportive legal and institutional environment were conceived. It was for the first time that the Planning Commission included a separate chapter on ‘Women and Development’ in the Sixth Five Year plan. Accordingly, the Sixth Plan adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment. During this period Maithreyi Krishnaraj’s well known work questioned the basic premise of sex roles and role conflict which the research work in women’s studies had focused on. She observed that most studies vis-à-vis educated employed women steered clear of
the complex gender relations and other social and economic processes, while emphasizing the sex roles.

In the Seventh Plan (1985-90), the developmental programmes continued with the major objective of raising the economic and social status of women and bringing them into the mainstream of national development. A significant step in this direction was the identification and promotion of the ‘Beneficiary-Oriented Schemes’ BOS in various developmental sectors, which extended direct benefits to women. The thrust on generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper education and vocational training continued. In the year 1985, the Department of Women and Child Development was set up as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to plan and implement innovative programmes for women and children.

This phase emphasised the need to recognise women and their role as not just passive beneficiaries but also contributors to the economy. This was to make women ’visible’ as a category in development research and policy. This has come to be characterized as the Women in Development approach. The WID approach targeted women for development, cooperation and integrating them in to the general activities of such practices. However women were viewed in isolation and as a homogenous group free from conflicts of interests. Even though much of the strategy was one of integration into development projects and institutions, the silence of addressing the structural constraints and the way institutions are gendered, led to an isolation, where much of the efforts stopped at adding on women to mainstream development. Mainstream development itself was critiqued by feminists as one, which followed the market mechanism and where women’s contributions were invisible, and without value. Swaminathan
(1991) in her work looked at how the planning vis-à-vis women in development continued to follow the patriarchal structures and gender roles ascribed by patriarchy. She observed that state policies are based on sex role analysis and therefore the state policies fail to bring about any change in sexual stratification. The inter linkages between class structures and other power structures like caste, ethnicity and race were also missed out in this approach.

In order to promote empowerment of women, Mahila Samakhya was launched in 1988 as a pilot programme in 10 districts of the States of UP, Gujarat and Karnataka. The National Policy on Education, 1986, laid the foundation of the mahila samakhya programme. It aimed at service delivery and sought to bring about change in women's perception about themselves and that of society with regard to women's traditional roles. It attempted to create an environment for women to seek knowledge and information in order to make informed choices and create circumstances in which women can learn at their own pace and rhythm. The programme was centred on ‘empowerment through education’ to achieve equality.

Although according to the 1971 and 1981 Census of India a high ratio of women were participating in the workforce, it’s interesting to note that most of these women were associated with occupations and activities which are home based or are exploitative in nature. As it was observed, most women in developing countries engage in heavy manual labour, of unskilled nature which is monotonous, repetitive and underpaid such as household labour, agricultural labour, labour on construction sites and labour in industries (Mukhopadhyay, 1985; Hara, 1984).
The studies on women and work in India have analysed women’s work in the context of family and mainly looked into the reasons and consequences of change in family type and composition. Women’s work and its impact on the family, changing family structures, role conflict and change of status for women have been studied extensively in the past.

During this phase a need was felt to understand the characteristics of women’s work and employment. This challenged the existing concepts of work and methods of accounting for women’s work. It led to elucidation of the continuum of women’s work which ranges from house work to home based productive activity and from wage labour to entrepreneurship. Work which can be quantified has been segregated on the basis of gender. It became important to redefine concepts of work and employment because on the basis of the definition the designation of worker was conferred and this recognition of a worker ensured that the worker is covered by the welfare policies and measures. Several authors have discussed how women’s work has been under counted owing to the gender biases in the available data.

Sen and Sen (1987) explored the relationship between women’s place in household work and labour market. They argue that women’s participation is restricted by their responsibility of child care and domestic work. The importance of these household activities determines which women would do what type of work, but should not affect the overall labour force participation. Kumat (1985) states that women who are gainfully employed in production of goods and services are the ones counted in the statistical surveys, thus underestimating women’s contribution. Anker et.al. (1987) in an attempt to derive evidence on factors causing under reporting female labour undertook a methods test survey. He found that four factors contribute to the invisibility of women workers. He discussed that the design of the questionnaire, definition of labour force, the
bias of the male interviewers in defining terms like head and household and the respondents themselves, who lack self-perception about their own status lead to under reporting of women’s work. Other studies also established that these four factors contribute in under enumeration of women’s contribution to the economy (Kumari, 198; Duvvury, 1989) also support this and call for the need to redefine work so that women’s work gets recognised. Jain 1 suggests that the questionnaires for enumeration of women’s work should be based in time allocation classification. The household activities which women tend to should be divided into household production and childcare, cooking and cleaning. This would help in highlighting productive domestic activities. The importance of women’s work as aggregate of ‘non-monetized’ and ‘monetized’ activities, to ensure that women are not seen as ‘auxiliary force’ is emphasised by Patel (1989).

Several surveys and studies confirmed that women in that period lagged behind in possessing technical skills. This era started recognising women’s contribution, their double burden and challenged the systems which deliberately seem to be eliminating women from the accounting system and made them invisible. Ahmad (1981) profiled working women whom she termed as ‘Trishankus’ as they seem to have double burden of work and household. She argues that women face discrimination at work place and because of family responsibility have low professional commitment, which is used as an argument against employing women. Joekes (1987) in her work highlights that distribution of women working in low paid jobs is high and women mainly work in jobs which are repetitive, low skilled and there are no inherent rewards and status of the work. In agriculture, women tend to stick to jobs done by hand like weeding, planting and threshing whereas men take over all the other tasks which involve use of machinery. Similarly in
manufacturing units women carry out the labour intensive manual tasks and remain at the lowest level. She sees it as a reflection of male female differential in acquiring higher education qualification.

Chakravarty (1985) highlighted the issues related to contractual nature of industrial workers. She opines that absence of job security and social welfare measures, denial of benefits like maternity benefit and lack of job security for women engaged in industrial work lead to exploitative situation. Some authors analysed women’s work status with respect to the government policies. James (1985) highlighted that most women, despite government policies, are given fewer opportunities to secure managerial positions, they suffer wage discrimination and are denied maternity benefits. Moreover, there dual responsibility of family and work curbs their ability to bargain with the employer. This has further been explored by Lal Das (1988) who examined it as two kinds of discrimination – ‘access’ discrimination and ‘treatment’ discrimination. The access discrimination restricts women to certain kinds of low skill jobs. Even within the segment of low skill jobs women are paid lower than their male counterparts and are discriminated against. Atmanand’s analysis of existing data shows that proportion of women workers to the total women population and to total number of workers has declined. However, the proportion in the unorganised sector has increased. This has led to exploitative work conditions for women, in absence of any measures to safeguard their interest.

Ahuja (1985) discussed the intra household distribution of resources, work and income. She also highlights the impact of technology on the status of women, in the framework of Amartya Sen’s cooperative conflict, which suggest that women should be strengthened through removal of
disabilities including economic disability of not getting fair opportunity to earn outside home. Madhok (1986) argues that the ideology of domestication confines women to household and issues of chastity and respectability restrict their choice of occupation. She highlights how segregation of tasks ensures differential payment and opines that possessing skills and techniques through new training programmes will not improve their status, unless the gender hierarchy is questioned. She suggests structural changes to improve the status of women.

A few studies also focused on migrant women who migrate because of poverty. Annie (1988) studied the women migrating from Kerala, Goa and Andhra Pradesh to Gulf countries for work, leaving behind their children and families. Most of these women have low skills and work in the care industry. They are most often engaged as nurses, ayahs in the hospitals, housemaids etc.

During this period several authors contested the positioning of women as a homogenous group. They argued that women’s economic roles cannot be seen in isolation of their social and cultural locations. Women’s access to opportunities and productive assets is marred by their low literacy levels, lack of training and their social and cultural location. Employment of women is determined by their age, education, education and income of husband, caste, class, family composition and job opportunities. In order to perpetuate the existing inequalities, strategies should take into account women’s multiple roles. Shanmugasundaram, 1 Sharma, 1  7.

Overall, during this phase an attempt was made by all players to highlight women’s issues, make them and their voices visible. The women’s movement, the state and the civil society within a new paradigm of development worked towards the dominant theme of gender and development.
The focus remained on poor, underprivileged women who were also seen as instruments to achieve the developmental goals of lower fertility, better child and maternal health and other human development goals.

2.4 1990’s till date:

During the 1990’s the women’s movement emerged as an important political force which strengthened the articulation of the women’s demand for their rights, rights of the girl child, women’s education, equality in decision making, balance in gender representation, sexual and reproductive rights, action against violence and institutional measures to ensure the implementation of policies to advance the development of women (Visvanathan et. al., 1997). This was also the phase when most developing countries were undergoing massive economic changes. The structural adjustment programme (SAP) was pushed by the developed nations in the third world with the objective of accelerating their economies. Under the domination of developed nations, third world countries became signatories and committed to areas of women’s development like education of girl child, institutional mechanisms to create an enabling environment for women. The commitment at international forums ensured that the local governments undertook programmes and implemented policies for taking gender into account at all stages of policy making, programme design and implementation (Razavi & Miller, 1995).

This phase saw the continuation of women in development with focus on empowerment of women which focused on control and autonomy, process orientation and the question of measurement. Empowerment was not seen as an end in itself or a goal which groups or persons reach, but a continuous developing process. It was acknowledged that it takes place in different
spheres of society: social, economic and political and psychological and has material, human and intellectual dimensions (Friedman, 1992; Sen & Baltiwal, 1997).

The Eighth Plan (1992-97), with human development as its major focus, played a very important role in the development of women. It promised to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors did not by-pass women, the 8th plan implemented special programmes to complement the general development programmes and to monitor the flow of benefits to women from other development sectors that enabled women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) which was in the post-Beijing period made two significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women. Firstly, ‘Empowerment of Women’ became one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan. The Women’s Component Plan emerged as part of this strategy for the empowerment of women. The 9th Plan adopted the Life Cycle approach for empowerment of women which categorizes women into 5 distinct sub-groups. The approach of the Ninth Plan was also to create an enabling environment where women could freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men. This was reflected in the early finalization and adoption of the `National Policy for Empowerment of Women', which laid down definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions along with a well-defined ‘Gender Development Index’ to monitor the impact of its implementation in raising the status of women from time to time. The Plan attempted convergence of existing services’ available in both women-specific and women related sectors. The operational strategy of 9th plan
directed all the central Ministries and state departments to draw up time bound action plan for women.

In the wake of globalisation, the developing countries underwent transformation from being a state driven economy to market driven economy. With the restructuring of the economy and greater reliance on the markets, welfare policies for the weaker and marginalised populations were not encouraged. During this period several empirical studies were undertaken in order to study the impact of globalisation on women working in industries like garment, electronics leather goods and silk industry. The studies established that there is a definite increase in women’s employment in these industries however this trend can be attributed to the need for cheap, unskilled and flexible labour and also use of their traditional skills (Baud, 1991; Rao and Husain, 1991; Pore, 1991; Banerjee, 1991). Also the studies revealed that women are allotted poorly paid jobs without any growth prospects. Baud (1991) in her study found that women and men worked together and women were being assimilated in most jobs in the power loom industry; she attributed this to unmatched demand and supply of labour. Banerjee (1991) commented on these findings and felt that this could be another form of segregating labour. Pore (1991) and Banerjee (1991) found that in the garment industry women worked on piece rate basis, whereas men worked on time rates. Also both the authors in respective studies found that when a skill is associated with female labour, it is valued at lesser rate as compared to a skill which men engage in. The perception of the employer, family and women was found to be the same with regards to women’s work. Women’s work was considered to be an extension of household activity and not as work which is valued. Even when women’s work is acknowledged to be productive, the perception of it being secondary to household work undermines the
importance and valuation of their work. Also the employer fragments the workforce, gender being the most effective division and isolates each group for cost cutting. The role of family and employer in making the women believe that they are doing meaningless activity and are getting paid was also discussed. These studies highlight that change in technology and change in economic policies affect women and assessment of their work in a social scenario where both the market and the family indulge in appropriation of women’s labour.

Desai and Jain (1994) in their study have found that most of the demographic and other studies which examine women’s work have focused on inequality in family, without contextualizing it in the context of inequality within other social and economic institutions. According to Rao et al. 1 women’s work is associated with low skills, low productivity and low income and little scope of upward mobility. Women working in manufacturing industries or service industries work as casual labour or assembly line workers in manual intensive operations, as secretaries to managers and work at the lower levels in most of the professions. Even though gender has been acknowledged as a critical variable in analysis and planning, but representation and recognition of women’s contribution in the development programmes has been inadequate Sethi, 1. Although literature highlights the feminisation of labour activity, the insecurity of work would mean that women would work on less favourable terms. An assessment of the impact of New Economic Policy by Ramanamma (1999) suggests that women have been deprived of both traditional and modern occupations, because of the introduction of cash economy and lack of skills for new jobs. The multinational companies (MNC) employ unskilled women for cost cutting, leading to increase in casual or home based labour, thus leading to insecurity and low wages. Also in a scenario where inflation is on the rise women are denied adequate nourishment,
medical care and education. Tanwar (1999) continues the argument presented by Ramanamma that modernization and mechanization of agriculture has led to marginalisation of the poor as rural economy experiences the technological changes. Women have benefitted little of any efforts made by the state and the policies as often the intent is to bring in change without changing the structures and perceptions of policy makers which are entrenched in a patriarchal and capitalist system (Agrawal, 1997; Patel, 2004; Hameed and Jain, 2009).

In a market driven economy, the underlying assumption is that mutual cooperation and concern for social justice are taken into account, but this assumption is more theoretical than practical leading to unequal power (Pathania, 1999). The unequal power not only manifests itself between developed and developing nations, but also between the weak and the privileged population. She highlights that the emerging hybrid culture of free market economy encourages commoditization of culture and does not allow for participation and accommodation. The hegemonic culture in a global economy subjugates women and reduces their inclination for collective resistance. Globalisation has exposed people to modern western culture which has led to emergence of consumerist culture supported by emergence of new middle class (Mohan, 1999).

Most literature around women, work and technology emphasised the ill effects of globalising economy, liberalisation of market and Structural Adjustment Programme. The phenomenon of global feminisation of poverty was recognised and the devaluation of women’s labour was seen as inherent in the market system which replicates the patriarchal structures. It was felt that although some people who are skilled will be benefited, poor and underprivileged which form the majority will bear the brunt of ruthless market economy. Due to intersection of caste and
class along with gender women will be the worst affected. Since the focus remained on the poor and the underprivileged, women who could attain skills, owing to changes in the policy related to education, work and empowerment were ignored.

In 2001 policy for empowerment of women was framed for advancement, development and empowerment of women. The government intended to create an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil. The commitment was to guarantee equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation and equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office. The onus of this development is not alone on women but the policy stressed the importance of participation of men to change social attitudes and community practices. In this context the Tenth Plan was bound by definite goals, targets and a time-frame. The main objective of empowering women was to bring about social change and development through women as change agents. This plan also tied up the concepts of Women Component Plan and Gender Budgeting to play a complementary role to each other, and thus ensure both preventive and post-facto action in enabling women to receive their rightful share from all the women-related general development sectors.

Although a large population got pushed to the periphery, with the advent of globalisation and liberalisation of the Indian market in the early 1990s, economy experienced boom in various
sectors. The Indian economy grew at 9.2 percent in 2007 and 9.6 percent in 2006. This growth has been a result of market reforms, huge Foreign Direct Investment inflow, increase in foreign exchange reserves and boom in capital market along with Information Technology (IT) and real estate. In 2007, India’s service sector contributed 53 percent of the GDP and had a growth rate of 11.18 percent as compared to industrial sector and agricultural sector which was 29 percent and 17 percent of the GDP respectively.\(^6\) According to Economic Survey 2011-2012 Services sector grew by 9.4 %, its share in GDP went up to 59%.

The emerging urban centres in India became witness to changing economy and newly emerging job opportunities. Educated middle class women started moving out of the traditional domains of teaching, medicine and banking in government sector and are working in private sectors and fields which were established as male bastion. Leela Visaria\(^7\) in her work mentions that ‘NSS data suggest that more than half of all women employed in so-called million plus cities (that is urban areas with populations of one million or more) work in the service sector’. The occupations for women range from high end jobs which require high education, knowledge and skill i.e. working with technology, programming and developing new technology to low end jobs like call centre jobs technically known as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) which need basic education and English language skills to service the clients of companies and gives them information about a range of services and products. A study done by Watson Wyatt (as mentioned in Mazumdar, 2008) shows that in India the gap between skilled men and women is shrinking and the average annual growth rate in skilled women (7 percent) was 1.5 times higher than the growth rate in skilled men. A previous study by NASSCOM revealed that in the Indian

\(^6\) www.economywatch.com/indianeconomy downloaded on 12/10/08

\(^7\) Leela Visaria (1998) as quoted in Dyson, Cassen and Visaria (2004: 111)
IT industry the percentage of women will grow from 30% to 45% by 2010. The male-female ratio is also expected to improve from 76:24 in 2005 to 65:35 by 2007.

Change in the international economic environment created more industrial resources and employment opportunities thus increasing the scope of employment for women. The breaking up of manufacturing processes into smaller steps made it possible for the multinationals to outsource the operations. The labour intensive operations are carried out in developing countries, thus saving greater costs. Cheap and easily available labour and educational standards of the labour force are some factors which enabled multinational companies (MNCs) to establish their manufacturing units, service units and back operations in countries like India. Since women are associated with qualities like patience, persistence, dexterity and team work which is required for the repetitive jobs and cheap labour, they are preferred over educated males due to the sex wage differential thus feminising the skilled labour force (Mitter, 2005). This created a massive demand for women in the economy.

Women’s position in the new digital economy is determined by her class, access to the technology and other resources and her countries position in the global economy (Mitter, 2005). In the context of the global economy and structural adjustment and reforms, technology has become an important input and MNCs have become an important agent for transferring the technology from the developed world to the other countries. Although new technology has generated more employment opportunities for women, literature reveals that the impact of it on gender relations within the workplace can be oppressive or empowering. In a study of young women professionals in Bagalore’s IT sector authors posit that ‘young women in the IT sector,
with their assertive attitudes, large incomes and renegotiated family relationships, may (or may not) begin to be imitated by others in a movement toward greater gender equity, and become role models for young women of less privileged backgrounds’ (Clark and Sekhar, 2007: 316). A group of researchers who conducted a study among women workers in Bangalore, Delhi, Faridabad and Pune found that even though companies claimed to be gender friendly, wage and non-wage bias was evident (Majumdar, 2008).

Several empirical works have noted that gender division of labour is not affected by technological advancements (Cockburn, 1985; Joekes, 1987). While access to technology is an important factor, it alone is insufficient to address gender gap. The important aspect is to determine the involvement of women in developing technology and related decision making (Morgan, 2004). Literature has also examined the impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes and technology on lives of women across rural and urban, ill effects of new working arrangements and timings on health of the workers, subscribing to gender roles in the changing technological scenario and the impact of technology on gender division of labour at home (Raghuram et.al., 1995; Balakrishnan, 2002; Kelkar and Nathan, 2002).

The positive impact of information technology on women’s employment cannot be denied, but women remain either at the low end of the service sector or are employed in positions subordinate to men. In contrast to the employment of large number of women in IT sector, the structure within strengthens the gender stereotypes rather than challenging or dissolving gender inequalities in any substantive manner and does not ensure that women are able to participate in
technology development and are able to enhance their decision making through increased knowledge, skills and education (Omvedt and Kelkar, 1995; Roychoudhary, 2005).

Since the multi-national companies provide services to the clients across the globe, there is a demand for flexible work hours round the clock. The social restrictions on mobility and issues of security are loosening up. The families also approve as it adds to the family income, with minimum educational qualification (Singh and Pandey, 2005). The Indian Government also made way for the women to work without restrictions of time by introducing The Factories (Amendment) Bill, 2005, allowing women to work between 10 pm and 6 am. It was expected that this would benefit women working in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), textiles, garments, handicrafts, leather and IT sector (especially call centres). Even though textile, garment and handicrafts industries employ large number of women, with the boom in Information technology (IT) and IT enabled sector (ITES) the number of women employees is on a rise as women are taking to computer sciences and electronics and also fewer women are dropping out because of marriage (Iype, 2005). India is among the top IT hubs and has become a major centre for Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). The ratio of men to women is 31:69 in ITES. The business has grown tremendously and has given opportunities to women to contribute to the growing economy.

Mobility is seen as an important factor for advancement of career and is also an important indicator of autonomy. Married women have less location choices, prefer offices close by and thus become less competitive in the job market. Their negotiations and autonomy in decision making is governed by various factors like household responsibility, husband’s location, distance
between home and work place and other societal barriers. They have access to technology but they are not able to use it for advancement of career. Restricted mobility thus translates into restricted career achievements.

However with increase in age at marriage, a segment of women who remain single have better chances of career advancement. A large number of single women move out of their primordial homes and live in cities away from families for work, as against their married counterparts who are bound by responsibilities of domestic work (Kelkar et. al., 2005). The decision to migrate for work is influenced both by opportunities, constraints, family and cultural factors (Uberoi and Palriwala, 2008). The number of women moving for work purposes is on a rise. According to the Census of India 2001, 12 percent women migrated for work as compared to 4 percent who migrated for the same reason in 1991. Dyson and Visaria (2004:111) in their analysis of census data on migration noted that ‘females have become increasingly prominent in all forms of migration even those that are urban bound.’

The dynamics of decision-making and autonomy is different for both married and unmarried women. Single women results into lesser household responsibilities and liabilities, low accountability and more freedom as compared to their married counterparts. However, on the other hand it leaves single women vulnerable without any family support in a social environment which traditionally does not view single women staying without family as respectable. Migrating single have benefits of greater equality, greater choices and freedom to make choices however, they constantly have to manoeuvre and bargain their position in a new site as these sites are not free from discrimination and exploitation. Even though young women contribute their
professional and technical expertise, add to the national income, pay taxes, support families and help them maintain living standards, they remain vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their gender (UNFPA, 2006).

The public discourse around these women working in BPOs range from health hazards, issues of security, impact of globalisation on Indian culture to issues of sexuality. The media reports of changing work culture and girls smoking, drinking, and dating attributed to night shifts and disposable incomes and BPO work culture are constructed in opposition to unrestricted mobility of women at night (Baxi, 2006). This group comes into the eye of media in wake of rape and murder of women working in BPOs. In fact most media news, report about women being unsafe, feeling insecure and inadequate measures taken by the industry to ensure their safety. One of the reports in 200 about Chennai BPO date rape case on one of the news website reported A call centre employee with a prominent BPO in Chennai was arrested few days back on charges of drugging and then raping his female colleague. This, however, seems to be a case of loose lifestyle practices and its eerie aftermath. In this piece of news it was interesting to note how questions were raised about girl’s not-so-good-conduct and the need to visit a bachelor’s pad and sharing drinks with him at an inappropriate time. In another report by Reuters the focus is on how young people working in call centres indulge in sex and drugs and are becoming westernized in their mannerisms and practices. As Baxi (2006) in her study noted the implication of assuming pseudo identities on norms and lifestyles is a concern. Most industry reports by NASSCOM or economic dailies hail the rise of women employees in BPO sector to be high standard of gender inclusivity and also see this as a result of gender sensitive policies. On the
contrary, media highlights the lack of safety norms and policies, effect of late night shifts in health of women and their social relations.

Although new technology has generated more employment opportunities for women, the impact of it on gender relations and whether employment opportunities in new technological setting are oppressive or empowering can be debated. The existing body of knowledge has focused on occupational health hazards, ill effects of new working arrangements and timings on health of the workers, increasing incomes leading to increasing consumerism and greater purchasing power, gender roles being subscribed to in the changing technological scenario, changing the gender division of labour at home, mobility and issues of security and change in traditional family and social relations.

The next chapter details out the conceptual framework around ‘agency’ as that formulates the basis of my interpretation of the women’s experiences.