PREFACE

The fact that women have been undergoing deprivations in terms of status, role importance, equal rights, equal participation in decision-making and in public affairs, is well understood, but is a disturbing feature of all under developing countries. In India, as well, the concept of dependency of women on men in social, economic and public affairs is deeply implanted and its links with the old feudal-sanskriti and patriarchal structure led to a more rigid observance of customs and norms. As a result, women are still treated as the ‘trust’ of fathers and ‘property’ of their husbands.

Women were made powerless and their subordination to men was encouraged by the Indian orthodoxy, while the British imperialism has caused great damage by neglecting woman’s education. Since women were deprived of inheritance, a male descendant became important, and for this, birth of a son became essential. With this the gender bias has started and got internalised in our system. Assertions about faithfulness of women and protection of them by men followed logically from these practices. Consequently women were deprived of leadership roles and economic participation rendering them dependent and powerless.

Although, the government, several progressive thinking social reformers and women’s organizations in India have adopted a positive approach and championed the cause of women, the women’s issues got over shadowed in the independence movement. Women in India did not threaten the patriarchal structures and never voiced for economic independence and changes in the relationships between the sexes. The only issues where considerable work has been done are in the area of social life such as, widow remarriage, age of marriage, civil code, purdah, polygamy, prohibition of dowry etc. However, women’s organizations have now taken up the issue of overall development of women.

The present study aims firstly, to analyse the emergence and growth of women organizations in India in historical perspective; secondly, to analyse the role of women organizations in women’s development and identify the areas where these organizations have succeeded and also the areas in which they have not been able to do much; thirdly, to analyse the effectiveness of various strategies evolved to mobilize public opinion for women cause; fourthly, to analyse the nature of leadership in women organizations; and
Lastly, to analyse the political ideology of these organizations and its implications for the overall development of the women.

It critically examines the factors responsible for the growth of the All India Women's Conference and National Federation of Indian Women, two leading all India women organizations, and the areas where they have been successful and where they need more and serious efforts for women's upliftment. Besides analysing the various strategies of these organizations, their leadership and political ideology, it also gives various suggestions for their effective working.

On the basis of major findings, we would like to stress the need for strengthening women organizations and providing funds liberally by the government. It must also be noted that the short-term policy measures are not capable of solving the basic problems of women and their organizations standing for the interests of the masses. Their basic problems are socio-political in character, the solution of which requires conscientization and politicisation of the masses. However, the strategy required is a combination of two-way struggle for their rights—one for the "legally entitled" (economic, social and political) and the other against this very social order for which gender is an important means of exploitation.

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters. First chapter deals with the problem and its context. Second chapter gives a brief history of women organizations and their activities in India. Role of women organizations in women's development is the subject-matter of third chapter. Various strategies adopted by women organizations are discussed in fourth chapter. Fifth chapter deals with the nature of leadership in women organizations, whereas, the political ideologies of women organizations are discussed in sixth chapter. The last and the seventh chapter provides the summary and conclusion.

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