CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY

&

CONCLUSION
Women consist of fifty per cent of the population of the world. Inspite of this fact, women have not been given equal status vis-a-vis men. Major part of this situation can be attributed to gender role socialization that operates in every society. This differential socialization raises boys and girls for different roles. However, if the total involvement is taken into account, women play multiplicity of roles that far exceed those of her male counterparts.

Traditionally the status and the role of women in the Indian society have been considered lower than those of men. In fact, the status and the role have undergone many changes over a period of time. In the pre-Vedic Aryan days, woman occupied the best place. The matrimonial system was the rule of the society. The woman’s image was high. Even the main deity of that time was Mother Goddess. She enjoyed property rights and freedom (Pandey and Upadhyay, 1990).

In the Vedic period, the society became patriarchal. There was much emphasis on the chastity and fidelity of women. Initially divorce and remarriage of widows were allowed. The principle of hypergamy for women was introduced. Restrictions on the behaviour of women were most rigid at the top of the caste hierarchy and this became the symbol of respectability. Thus the status of women became inferior to men. However, in the Vedic period, there was a sound philosophy of life which gave honourable position to woman in society. A synthesis between material and spiritual life was made and women were assigned key role in both of them. Attempts were made to develop the physical and intellectual faculties of women. Although names of many women are mentioned in the sacred Vedic texts who excelled in intellectual and spiritual spheres, they were considered lower to men. Women were characterized less rational and more emotional. It is very difficult to surmise that all women enjoyed the same rights and privileges. The main sphere of life for women was domestic. According to many writers, sages and philosophers
Hindu women in this period held an honoured place. They inherited and possessed property; they took share in the sacrifices and religious duties; they attended great assemblies and state occasions; they distinguished themselves in science and learning at their times; they were considered as intellectual companions of their husbands, as the friends and loving helpers in the journey of their life partners, in their religious duties, and the centre of their domestic bliss. Thus, Hindu wives were honoured and respected in ancient times.

In the post-Vedic period, the situation of woman became worst. In the smriti period, she was, in rhetoric, considered worthy for worship, but in practice, denied even her individuality. She was put under the tutelage of the father, son and husband as the case may be, and was not considered worthy of independence even in her own home. The privilege of studying Veda and performing the sacred ceremonies became to be reserved only for Brahmin males. Women were forced to remain ignorant and illiterate. Sons came to be considered essential to performing sacrifices to the family ancestors; daughters stood nowhere in the picture. The function of women was reduced to child-bearing and home-making. Women came to be considered polluted and untouchables during the periods of her menstruation, confinement and child-bearing. Unless a woman was able to produce a son in the patriarchal system, she had no value. Thus, the Vedic attitude towards woman underwent change in the post-Vedic period that was antagonistic to her (Pandey and Upadhyay, 1990).

In the epic period, there was a renaissance of the Hindu culture, the great Hindu epics—the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, incorporated both popular lore and Vedic ideas. One gets prototypes of feminine ideals which influenced all later generations of Indian woman—the ideal of Sita and ideal of Draupadi. The heroine of the Ramayana—Sita—provides the feminine ideal
of the chaste, self-sacrificing wife. Sita epitomises the ideal of absolute wifely fidelity. The heroine of the *Mahabharata*—Draupadi—married as she was to five husbands served mythic archetype for the customs of polyandry and the levirate—a departure of both Brahmanic practice and Vedic Aryan precept. Draupadi's marriage was rationalized on supernatural grounds—that it was preordained, and thus it was removed from the human domain, discounting it as a polyandrous model of society. When Draupadi was being stripped naked in the court of Kaurava Kings, she entreated each of her husbands to help. But, each, in turn, failed her. She was finally saved from being stripped naked publicly by the divine intervention of Krishna. This divine intervention discounts Draupadi's own strength to save herself and separates her from human society.

The appearance of Buddhism did act as a temporary check on the decline of status of women, but could not have lasting impact. The Buddhists reacted against caste and the sacrificial ritual of Brahmanism. Kshatriyas revolted against the monopoly of Brahmans on the classlines. Women were admitted to the Buddhist order, which offered women an alternative to subjugation to husbands and patriarchy. Buddhist doctrine rejected the Brahmanic view that a son was indispensable for rebirth. Buddha believed that both men and women can attain *nirvana* even though he himself did not accept women disciple. However, women were assigned lower status than men in both homes and monasteries. Despite this, some have suggested that the ancient period of Buddhist influence was a kind of golden age for women.

Muslim attitude towards women was complementary to those of Hindus. Under the impact of Islam, the upper castes' restrictive aspect on women became more rigid. Hindu society adopted many tactics to protect women from the Muslim invaders, for the family honour was identified with the chastity of women. The *purdah* system and the child marriage are its obvious results.
The Bhakti movement did bring the message of love and equality for women and Shudras, but it was lost with the rise of asceticism. The status of women received a serious set-back due to Saints' attitude towards them. Some saints came to regard women as an object of material pleasure, Maya, while others thought them a barrier in the path of liberation. Whatever achievement was, it was within the traditional fold. So there could be no redemption of women.

The British rulers did not interfere with the traditional Indian social system as their purpose was to rule and not to disturb the equilibrium by taking radical steps like reforms for women. However, in the process of manipulating and serving their own interest, the colonial masters introduced English and allowed missionaries to operate. This created an army of men who started questioning the utility of age-old social system. And, this subsequently led to the reform movement of the renaissance period. Educated Indian elites in the nineteenth century focussed attention on the plight of women. They attacked the social practices of child-marriage, the harsh treatment of widow and sati pratha. They worked towards education of women in an effort to create the pre-conditions for improvement in the status of women. The social reformers emphasized the female aspects of Hinduism.

Another major force for change in the status of women was the national movement. Many women joined the struggle for freedom along with men. The educated, active male relations of upper-class women also brought women in the nationalist movement. The consequences of the independence movement was, however, less fortunate for women, for the independence movement was limited only to independence. Women's rights were not the primary goal to the national movement. So the effects were limited to the pre-independence period. Women had joined a moral and political struggle, not a feminist or even women's movement. While much of the impetus of
the movement was lost in 1947, only some women leaders carried out their missions into the post-independence period. Some observers go to the extent of saying that India has never had a genuine women’s movement and the spirit of independence struggle has been irretrievably lost. Several barriers continued in the post-independence period.

According to Altekar (1938), "Thus, for nearly 2000 years from 200 B.C. to 1800 A.D., the position of women steadily deteriorated though she was fondled by the parents, loved by the husband and revered by her children. The revival of sati, the prohibition of remarriage, the spread of purdah and the greater prevalence of polygamy made her position very bad. As Neera Desai (1957) puts it, "Ideologically woman was considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality; socially, she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any right, suppressed and oppressed; she was further branded as basically lacking the ethical fibre. The patriarchal joint family, the customs of polygamy, the purdah, the property structure, early marriage, self-immolation of the widows (sati) or a state of permanent widowhood, all these contributed to the smothering of the free development of women".

The status of women in Indian society has closely been linked with Indian kinship and economic system which assign a subordinate and secondary role to women in the family and consequently in the society. It largely depends on the rights, roles and opportunities for participation in economic activities. However, the economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society’s stage of development. The recognition of the production capacities and potential of women in development is very recent, though longover. The extent development paradigms had produced a mind set which saw men as 'producers' and women as 'consumers', assigning men not only the tasks of production but also providing the education and training necessary
for the same. Women, on the other hand, were assigned the privileged tasks of familiar nutrition and consumption ignoring their roles as producers (Gupta and Mittal, 1995).

With the dawn of Independence, our Constitution guaranteed equality to the genders. This was a great boon to the women of India, who constituted almost half of the population. India was one of the first countries in the world to grant voting rights to women. Gradually, with the growth of modernization, urbanization and industrialization, and with the break up of the joint family system and rising prices, women began to come out of the Lakshman Rekha of their houses and work outside for a wage or salary. This gave rise to the concept of ‘Working Woman’. Thus, the women have now largely been unchained from her bondage and given legitimate freedom.

Rajagopalachari once said, “Women can do everything these days, except become a father”. Today’s women are proving theirselves worthy of this statement and are doing everything humanly possible both at the work place as well as at the home. Some of them are superwomen tackling various incompatible tasks efficiently. As Shri Ramakrishna once said, “She creates, preserves and destroys the world with a mere wink of Her wondrous eyes; she holds the universe in her womb.”

After India gained independence and our Constitution makers granted equality of status to women, and also gave them the right to vote, still in general, women do not enjoy full equality of status in the society. This is specially true of the vast majority of women in the rural areas, who are illiterate, house-bound and ignorant of their rights under the law. In the urban areas, with the spread of education and the increase in the number of women working outside their houses, the situation is however better. Increased awareness, education and the efforts of the government and non-governmental organizations has resulted in some change of attitudes among women and
on work. These changed attitudes have led to the redefining of some of the roles women play in our society. This is evident from the increased women's participation in education, employment, polity, decision-making in health and family planning and most importantly in their protests against social evils like dowry, amniocentesis and more recently the anti-liquor movement. However, the status of Indian women, by and large, remains lower to that of men.

An analysis of the various facts of the status of women in Indian society today reveals, that though we are progressing towards the 21st century, a lot needs to be done for the upliftment of women, who constitute half of the population of our country.

Though several laws have been passed for the benefit of women since independence, e.g. Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, Equal Remuneration Act etc.—these are full of loop-holes and ambiguities. Moreover, many women, specially those in the rural areas, are unaware of their rights under the Acts meant for their benefit.

Though no body can deny the fact that Indian women have stormed almost all male bastions and are venturing into few fields including administration, science, technology, medical, journalism and the like, but they are still in a sizable minority. The number of women in top positions is still very low. It is with the silent majority, who are still steeped in backwardness, poverty, illiteracy and superstition, that the Government, NGOs and the community should be more concerned about.

Inspite of the equality of status guaranteed under the Constitution, double standards prevail in every sector of development, and in the crucial sector of health, education and social development, while thousands of little girls still work in the fireworks factories at Sivakasi in Tamilnadu, millions of others help their mothers in domestic chores and in looking after younger
siblings or work as maid servants. The evil of child marriage is still prevalent in states like Rajasthan, 'Gender bias' and 'Gender inequality' should be done away with, at the earliest, if our country is to progress.

Status of women in society denotes her position with others in terms of rights and obligations. In discussions on women's status in any society, the general conception has been to assess their roles in relation to men. Two other dimensions have also been introduced to facilitate such assessment; firstly, the extent of actual control enjoyed by women over their own lives and, secondly, the extent to which they have access to decision-making process and are effective in positions of power and authority.

The Constitution of India promises to secure all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and to promote fraternity among them all. To realize the goals the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights. Along with these, certain negative rights, prohibiting discrimination or denial of equal protection of law are also guaranteed. The Constitution recognized the unequal social position of women and a special clause empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children even in violation of the obligation not to discriminate among citizens. Therefore, special laws have been enacted for the protection of women workers in factories, mines and plantation and to provide maternity relief to women workers in organized sector. Thus the Constitution envisaged a social revolution, brought about through the use of law as an instrument of direct social change. Equality of opportunity in public employment and office has helped to ensure a significant position and status to urban, middle class, educated Indian women, demonstrated in increasing number of women in the public services and in position of political power and dignity.

The special attention given to the needs and problems of women as one of the weaker sections' of Indian society, and the recognition of political
equality was, undoubtedly, radical departure from the norms prevailing in traditional India. The Committee on the Status of Women had identified the dilemma of Indian women in following words—"Traditional India had seen a woman only as a member of the family or group—as daughters, wives and mothers and not as an individual with an identity or right of her own. The radicalism of the Constitution and its deliberate departure from the inherited social system lay in its implicit assumption that every adult woman whatever her social position or accomplishments, will function as a citizen and as an individual in the task of nation building.

These special provisions for women in Indian Constitution were result of social reform movement which began in 19th century emphasizing improvement of women's status. These reformers tried to achieve these objectives through social legislation. These social reformers agreed that no substantial social change could be achieved as long as women were deprived of opportunities of self development and participation. However, majority of them saw women as custodians of the family and responsible for the well-being of children inculcating in them the cultural values and very few of them thought in terms of women's right to participate in social functions outside the family frame-work.

After independence, suggestions of comprehensive reforms of Hindu law were accepted by the government. Though there was much resistance to the bill in the beginning from within and outside the Congress, the opposition to bill proved that the implications of equality clauses in the Constitution had not been seriously appreciated even by those who framed the Constitution. Thus legal position of Hindu women has been improved considerably by the ban on polygyny, the provisions of right to divorce, and the right to inherit a share of parental property. However, similar reforms have not taken place in all other systems of personal law in India. The
Muslim women continue to be victims of polygyny, unilateral system of divorce and absence of maintenance provision after divorce. The goal of uniform civil code mentioned in the Directive Principles of state policy and emphasized in Supreme Court judgement is yet to be achieved.

Isolation of women, who constitute half of the population from the national mainstream, must be avoided at all costs. It should be realized that every issue is a women's issue, and their contribution and role in the family as well as in the economic development and social processes are pivotal. There should be recognition of the dignity of women's work and proper understanding of its dimensions. Women's upliftment depends on two pre-requisites—self reliance and economic independence. The three issues of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) efforts are vistas for the upliftment of women.

Thus, there is an imperative need to develop an integrated multipronged strategies to handle the problems of women in all their dimensions given strong measures, cooperation and commitment of the general masses and vigorous implementation of the schemes without delay, there is no reason why the women in India should continue in the role of 'inferior, oppressed and exploited beings, completely dominated and overviewed by man' (Gupta and Mittal, 1995).

The Constitution of free India guarantees equality between the sexes. In the post independence period, many steps seem to have been taken to uplift the status of women in India. However, how it is actually to be achieved, still remains a matter of controversy.

Many voluntary organizations have come up in India which deal with women's problems and work in this field and claim the credit of changes in the status and role of women in the present day Indian society. We have made an attempt in the present study to elicit the role of two voluntary
organizations—namely, All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) which are the leading women's organizations dealing with women's problems and their socio-economic upliftment.

7.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are as under—

1) To analyse the emergence and growth of women's organizations in India in historical perspective;

2) To analyse the role of women’s 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;

3) To analyse the effectiveness of various strategies evolved to mobilize public opinion for women's cause;

4) To analyse the nature of leadership in women’s organizations; and

5) To analyse the political ideology of these organizations and its implications for the overall development of the women.

7.1 COVERAGE

The study is confined to the activities of AIWC and NFIW in Delhi, Chandigarh and Western Uttar Pradesh. For the study of leadership 90 national, state level and local branch level leaders have been covered. An attempt is made to cover mostly the present office bearers and the executive committee members of both the organizations who constitute the universe of study. For knowing the nature of the leadership and the political ideology of these organizations, 210 women members, 136 women who have been the beneficiaries of the activities of these organizations, and 119 others (non-members and non-beneficiaries) constitute the universe of study for
analysing the role of these organizations and also the efficacy of strategies evolved to mobilize public opinion for women's cause. Thus 90 individual leader, 210 members, 136 beneficiary and non-members, 119 non-beneficiary women (a total sample of 555 respondents) constitute the *units of observation* for collecting primary data.

7.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data are collected both from the secondary and primary sources. Secondary data are collected through the published and unpublished records, reports and documents to know the historical background and the role played by the AIWC and NFIW. Primary data are collected through two structured schedules—one for leaders and members and another for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The first schedule (for leaders and members) contains 19 questions. The second schedule (for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) contains 24 questions. The primary data collected through schedules are processed through Computer. The secondary data and the data collected through the indepth informal interviews are handled manually.

7.4 FINDINGS AND INFERENCES

We would like to present the major findings and inferences according to the objectives of the study one by one. Our first objective relates to the emergence and growth of women's organizations in India in historical perspective. All India Women's Conference (AIWC), one of the oldest and pioneering voluntary organization established in 1927, has been working for the emancipation of women for many decades. The organization has over 1,00,000 members in 500 branches all over the country with the headquarter at Delhi. AIWC has established itself as one of the major NGO for the welfare of women and children and to help women to utilize to the fullest the fundamental rights conferred on them by the Constitution of India. National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) was founded in Calcutta in 1954. Its
base is not confined to middle-class women in cities but big majority of its seven lakh members are from the poor, toiling sections of the society. Rural women form the bulk of its membership. It works for the complete emancipation of Indian women—social, economic, cultural and political based on equality of rights between men and women and full social justice for physical, intellectual, moral, artistic and educational well being. The NFIW believes that for women to win a status of real equality it is necessary to struggle for bringing about a new socio-economic order where exploitation would end. Its headquarter is also in Delhi and is affiliated to women’s International Democratic Federation, which stands for friendship, unity and solidarity of women throughout the world.

A number of factors are responsible for the growth of these organizations in terms of their membership as well as their activities. Among the most important ones are—(i) the realization that no substantial achievement can be made towards equality of sexes and eradication of women’s problems unless they themselves organise and struggle hard for their just place in the society; (ii) expansion of education among women and increasing enlightenment of their rights; (iii) women liberation movement in the West and its far reaching achievements; (iv) increasing violence against women—criminal (like rapes, kidnapping, abduction and murder), domestic (like dowry deaths, wife battering, atrocities on widows etc.) and social (like sexual exploitation and sexual harassment in forms of prostitution, devadasi system, pornographic literature, advertisements, movies, cabare dances, teasing, femicide and foeticide etc.); (v) strengthening of patriarchal values by mass media of communication; (vi) denial of due share to women in political power and higher bureaucratic positions; (vii) discrimination in jobs and lower wages, and (viii) changing status and roles.

The substantial changes due to technical advancement and social
development have created new challenging roles and status for the Indian women especially for the middle class women. As a member of the family, she has to perform certain traditional roles apart from taking an active part in economic activity. The increasing trends of participation in work force and social life also put lot of demands upon the educated women. In such situations they have to make adjustments between their traditional role in the family (which can't be totally neglected) and the new role outside the family. The role of voluntary organizations has been conducive in helping or smoothing their changing status and roles.

Our second objective relates to the role of women's 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. We have broadly categorized the role of voluntary organizations into five areas which touch upon their contribution in the changing status of women in the field of development—health, education, economic activities, political participation of women and victimization.

The findings of the study show that the AIWC has following achievements at national level—

1) Literacy (spread of formal and non-formal education);
2) Family planning awareness;
3) Income-generating programmes & training-cum-production centres for the women;
4) Socio-economic upliftment & small saving schemes for the poor; and
5) Consultative status in various international bodies.

As regards the NFIW, the following achievements at the national level are worth mentioning—
1) Socio-economic upliftment & small saving schemes for the poor;
2) Income-generating programmes & training-cum-production centres for the women;
3) Literacy (spread of formal and non-formal education);
4) Representation in various governmental bodies/committees; and
5) Consultative status in various international bodies.

At local levels, the achievements of AIWC are as follows—
1) Literacy (spread of formal and non-formal education);
2) Income-generating programmes & training-cum-production centres for the women;
3) Improved chulha and non-conventional energy;
4) Socio-economic upliftment & small saving schemes for the poor;

and

5) Family planning awareness.

The achievements of NFIW at local levels are as follows—
1) Literacy (spread of formal and non-formal education);
2) Family planning awareness;
3) Socio-economic upliftment and small saving schemes for the poor;
4) Income-generating programmes & training-cum-production centres for the women; and

5) Awareness of women’s problems, legal aid and counselling.

As regards the major areas of women’s development, AIWC has done commendable job in the following areas—
1) Socio-economic upliftment and income-generating programmes;
2) Awareness about lacunanae in laws affecting women; and
3) Adult education (non-formal education)/family planning.

Notable areas of women’s development covered by NFIW are as follows—

1) Socio-economic upliftment and income-generating programmes;
2) Awareness about various women’s issues/problems; and
3) Adult education (non-formal education)/family planning.

Thus we find that the selected women’s organizations have major achievements in health, education and economic activities. They have put less stress in the areas of political participation of women and victimization. Thus we can say that much needs to be done in the areas of mass mobilization of women, increasing political awareness, political efficacy and political participation among women, rehabilitation of child prostitutes and women in distress, women’s entrepreneurship and awareness about the need for smaller families, women’s education and employment, and lastly women’s exploitation. They should specially lay stress on rural women and the women in unorganized work force. Even the women not associated with these organizations feel that priority should be given to such areas as sex discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment, dowry, violence against women, health and nutrition, and education and employment.

In fact, in Indian society, women suffer not only due to illiteracy and poverty, but also because of their cultural beliefs, prejudices, taboos and superstitions. All these points have a strong bearing on attitude formation which in turn affect health, nutrition, care of children etc., in which women play primary and active role. These organizations should help women by exposing them to higher levels of knowledge for longer duration which must help in changing of their attitudes.
Last but not the least, the role of voluntary organizations has helped in changing the status of women at least at social and associational level and help the women to realize their status and role in all spheres of social activities specially industrialization and modernization. By entering into economic force women can have better medical care, better homes and the possibility of extending children’s education. The working women have not only improved the financial condition of their families but also acquired personal status and independent social standing.

Along with the changing characteristics of marriage contract the degree of economic independence of women is also undergoing radical changes. Now the movement has been towards equality. The young women once had no alternative other than accepting early marriage and economic dependence but they can now assert on their own and economic independence has given them more power to choose when and whom to marry, to take part in important decisions in the family and play an important role in the social system. Though they are perhaps still far from possessing an equal economic status to that of men, but the present on going changes have given them equal recognition.

Women’s organizations have many handicaps and limitations. The lack of funds is the major handicap to expand their activities and to do much for women’s cause. The other handicaps include lack of government support, lack of public support, apathy of leadership and lack of dedicated workers and trained personnel.

Our third objective relates to **various strategies evolved by women’s organizations to mobilize public opinion for women’s cause**. There are conflicting views regarding the various strategies of women’s organizations, their efficacy and their implications. In fact, every organization adopts different strategies depending upon its aims and objectives. The major strategies used
by both the selected women’s organizations to mobilize public opinion for women’s cause are exactly the same. They are as follows—

1) Conventions, seminars, conferences and workshops;
2) Awareness among the masses;
3) Public meetings and rallies;
4) Media reporting & campaigning through posters and leaflets; and
5) Mahalla meetings.

Though all these strategies are adopted and have proved efficacious, still the experiences of leaders and members of AIWC and NFIW at grassroot level reveal that the best strategy is the collective action in which groups of women are organized together around common issues and concerns and through a process of dialogue and discussion raise their critical consciousness. Historically also it has been shown that the capacity to confront the nature of gender inequality and women’s emancipation can only be fulfilled by the bottom-up struggle of women’s organizations (Moser, 1989). This approach is becoming widely accepted under the given situation of poverty, deprivation and powerlessness among women in most of the developing countries. Empowering women by education and organization through awareness building, asset-building and income generation, and leadership development has also been emphasized (Reddy, 1987 and Reddy and Rao, 1995).

The fourth objective of the present study relates to the nature of leadership in women’s organizations. The findings show that the emerging leadership of AIWC and NFIW has the following qualities—

1) More than half (55.6 per cent) of the leaders are in the age group of 51 years and above showing that the age is an important factor in the leadership of these women’s organizations. However, middle aged group has also started emerging significantly in leadership of these women’s organizations.
2) An overwhelming majority (93·3 per cent) of the leaders of the two organizations is of married women.

3) Leadership of women’s organizations is confined to highly educated women as a little more than half (53·3 per cent) of the leaders of both the organizations are post-graduates, whereas 43·3 per cent are graduates.

4) There is no particular occupation feeding leadership of women’s organizations, still 40·0 per cent leaders of both the organizations are from teaching profession and nearly one-fourth (23·3 per cent) of them are housewives.

5) 41·1 per cent leaders of both the organizations have no income of their own, but remaining have income of more than Rs. 5000 per month.

6) 90 per cent leaders of both the organizations have family income of more than Rs. 10,000 per month.

7) Nearly two-third (63·3 per cent) leaders of both the organizations belong to the small-sized families and a little less than one-third (30·0 per cent) to medium sized families.

8) 53·3 per cent of the leaders of both the organizations are from nuclear families, whereas remaining 46·7 per cent are from joint families.

9) More than three-fourth (76·7 per cent) leaders of both these organizations belong to middle range castes, whereas remaining 23·3 per cent are from higher castes. None of them hails from lower caste.

10) More than three-fourth (83·3 per cent) leaders of both the organizations are Hindus.
11) An overwhelming majority of the leaders of both the organizations (83.3 per cent) are not the members of any political party.

Thus we can say that leadership of women's organizations is confined to comparatively elder, married, Hindu women of small-sized families, of middle range castes having high family income and no active membership of any political parties. Being highly educated they are aware of problems of womenfolk in India. This has also made them more dynamic and responsive to various women's issues.

The fifth and the last objective of this study relates to the political ideology of these organizations and its implications for the overall development of the women. AIWC, though not affiliated with any political party formally, has largely been influenced by the political ideology of Indian National Congress due to its top leaders having close links with the Congress leadership. In fact, the involvement of this organization in women's problems has been basically in the spirit and as per the norms contoured by the Indian National Congress. It may also be pointed out that AIWC has played a fairly significant role highlighting the problems faced by women in the colonial setting and was actively involved in the nationalist movement.

NFIW, being a political wing of Communist Party of India, has always been influenced by Communist ideology. Its membership has grown rapidly during the last forty years. The NFIW has grown to become one of the largest all India mass organization of women in the country having a membership of one and a quarter million and branches in all states. The NFIW believes that it is of vital importance to fight against oppression and atrocities on women to enable them to emerge as equal partners in the nation's struggle against poverty, unemployment, exploitation and for a truly secular society.

One fact is quite common to both these organizations. This fact
relates to their unending struggle for the upliftment of women and solving their problems, and/or creating awareness in masses about their problems. Their political ideology has not come in this humane cause for women's upliftment. Though they have not succeeded fully, but their efforts have been quite fruitful. Majority of respondents belonging to NFIW (83.8 per cent) are of the view that voluntary organizations can contribute much more for women's development if they are affiliated to political parties. However, this view is not acceptable to nearly two-third respondents belonging to AIWC.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Indian women have been a part of the world-wide awakening. The International Women's Decade (1985-95) helped them to simultaneously focus on diverse issues which different sections of Indian womanhood were trying to clarify, fight for and organise themselves round at various levels. The struggle for women's rights in India has a long history going to at least the mid-nineteenth century and, more purposively, the class and mass struggles against British rule in the twenties, thirties and forties of the last century. It acquired, however, a new edge, objective and sensitivity from mid-sixties, when it was realised that the formal rights granted in the Constitution and subsequent policies formulated presumably to implement them were being vitiating, distorted or not permitted to be exercised by the rulers themselves pursuing a particular path of development. The inherent anti-poor and masculine patriarchal bias in that path of development was becoming clear from the mid-sixties. The plans which were supposed to usher in growth with justice exposed their true pro-property and masculine-patriarchal character and started to reveal their inability to expand the limited opportunities available to the vast bulk of the poor and the various dis-advantaged classes, castes, minorities and the overwhelming majority of women. Along with the upsurge of other dis-advantaged strata, the women half of the Indian population also started
stirring. By the mid-seventies individuals, groups, grass-roots activists, researchers and sensitive sections of urban and rural women started a conscious search for preventing the oppression and exploitation, sexual harassment and domestic violence which were being intensely felt both by educated middle class women as well as by women of the agrarian poor, ruined artisans, the tribal population, as well as scheduled and other despised castes and craft groups.

A number of grass-roots organizations have been coming into being in India and are functioning in tribal, rural and urban areas. They are carrying on agitations, campaigns, rescue and rehabilitation work, legal and pressure movements to expose the atrocities and tortures which women of various strata are subjected to. They are also involved in the activities which attempt to assist, console and prepare the victims to build up courage and organise themselves to fight back. Some of these organizations take up the issues of battered women, of women who are raped, tortured or are led to the stage of even attempting to end their lives. They crusade against the menace of dowry which has resulted in thousands of murders of married women, misdescribed as suicides or dowry deaths. Some of the organizations have started a systematic campaign for conscientisations of women through the use of various media like posters, pamphlets, exhibitions, slide shows, films, street corner plays and group songs as well as ‘padayatras’ in certain areas. All India Women’s Conference and National Federation of Indian Women are two such organizations which have done tremendous work for the awakening of women and their socio-economic upliftment. These two women’s organizations have major achievements in health, education and economic activities. However, much needs to be done in the areas of political participation of women and their victimization. We can say that much has to be done in the areas of mass mobilization of women, increasing political awareness,
political efficacy and political participation among women, rehabilitation of child prostitutes and women in distress, women's entrepreneurship and awareness about the need for smaller families, women's education and employment, and lastly women's sexploitation. They should specially lay stress on rural women and the women in unorganized work force. Our study has shown that the ordinary women, not associated with these organizations, feel that priority should be given to such areas as sex discrimination, sexploitation and sexual harassment, dowry, violence against women, health and nutrition, and education and employment.

The problems of isolation, paucity of funds, lack of government support, lack of public support, apathy of leadership and lack of dedicated workers and trained personnel, dangers of foreign funding and limitations of cadres in these organizations need serious attention of the government and all those concerned with women's upliftment. The examination of their relative merits and weaknesses in dealing with obstacles and combating the efforts of powerful vested interests and agencies to weaken, divide and repress their struggles shows how hard they are struggling to achieve their aims and objectives. The threats to women's existence and deterioration in the conditions of women's earning power as a consequence of the global economic recession, massive retrenchment leading to growing unemployment and underemployment among those who have to live by selling their labour power and skills and its more drastic impact on earning opportunities for women in particular should also be taken note of by these organizations as well as the government.

In the end, we would like to stress the need for strengthening women's 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. The 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.