WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenges of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance”

(Kofi Annan)

Hallow moon, existence in waters,

Crumbled isolated but none bothers.

Unresponsive yells, why these owl cries?

Is there any reflective sky where Answer lies?

(Azhar Amin)

WOMAN

Woman the dictionary meaning of this word is “an adult human female”.¹ If we minutely observe the dictionary meaning there one comes across the word ‘human’ which indicates that she is also a human being just like a man. She has status, feelings, desires, needs and dreams just like a man. But in present time this definition has reduced, it only remained “an adult female”. She is not treated like a human being. She faces a lot of problems like social, political and religious problems.

Being a researcher the focus of the research would be on some of the problems that the women face in the society some problems would be analyzed that hinder the progress and development of the women.
➢ It is the stage when a woman passes through the stages like marriage, responsibility of other family, employment problems etc.

➢ Dowry, social discrimination and violent victimization it’s faced more by the women of this age group.

➢ Most of the divorces happen during this period, as it is the crucial stage for a woman in her life cycle.

EMPOWERMENT

The general meaning of the term ‘empowerment’ means power of an individual to take decisions in matters relating to themselves in relation to self-development. Garden feels, ‘the individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, repressively to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual with power has constituted, is at the same time its vehicle’. According to Chandra Kohli (1997) women empowerment means, the manifestation and redistribution challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance.

Liberal meaning of the term ‘empowerment’\(^2\) has become powerful there today in all spheres of life as a process to strengthen the elements of society. It is transformation of the structure or institutions that are creating gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material resources. Gender disparity is found in various forms, the most obvious being is the decreasing ratio of female in population.

The concept of women empowerment appears after several important debates generated by the women movement throughout the world, and particularly by ‘Third world Feminists’. Its bases can be traced to the interaction between feminism and ‘popular education’ developed in Latin America in the 1970s.
The most important feature of the term empowerment is ‘power’. So Empowerment means the process to challenge existing power relations, and of gaining control over the sources of power whether social, political and economic empowerment. The term ‘women empowerment’ has taken its origin with women struggle for social justice and equality. According to Pillai, ‘Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to gainful power and identity in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity which could be given as alms. Power has to be acquired and once acquired, it should to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Sharma points out “The term empowerment refers to arrangement of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, mobilization and protest that challenge basic power relations”. According to Government of India, “women Empowerment means moving from a position that is from powerlessness to one of power, it would promote women inherent strength and her identity”.

The ‘empowerment’ approach was first clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Activities with Women for a New Era (DAWN). This term got importance in early nineties in Western Countries. In India the central government in the ninth plan 1997-2000 shifted the concept of development to empowerment and observed the year 2001 as ‘Women Empowerment Year’.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The status of women in India has been subject to vast changes over the past few millennia. In ancient times, Indian women used to enjoy equal status with men. Many reformers and social workers raise voice for the rights of women either because of the role of women in the society or their special character as described in Upanishads. But during the medieval period, the rights of women have been reduced in spite of arguments and support from many reformers. In modern India, women have been holding high level positions in administration, corporate sector and
politics. They are at highest positions such as President of India, Prime Minister of India, Speaker of Lok Sabha, etc., in Indian Parliament. In spite of these, women in modern India are exposed to various social problems and issues. According to a global study conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women. In terms of World Bank empowerment is "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is action which build both individual and collective assets and improve the fairness and efficiency of the organization and institutional context which govern the use of these assets." Economist Bina Agarwal defines empowerment as a process that enhances the ability of the persons and powerless individuals or groups to challenge and change in their favor, existing power relationship that places them in subordinate economic, social and political position. Empowerment can manifest itself in acts of individual resistance as well as mobilization of groups. Empowerment is multi-dimensional it not only refers to the expansion of freedom of choice but action in all spheres-economic, political, social/cultural, personal and familiar to change the one's life”.

According to a research report on women status in India it is clear that the status of women started declining around approximately 500 BC. During Vedic period it is noted that women enjoyed equal rights and a better status than men. Women rights were curtailed and more protective steps towards women prevailed during medieval period. Many restrictions and barriers were put on women education, religious rights and privileges and on their political and social activities. The role and status of women in India was clarified in Manu Smriti. Manu fully recognized the importance of women as equal to that of man. The role of women is important for formation of a live society, as per Manu. However, he is of the opinion that women is dependent on men. Her activities should be controlled and guided by men at every stage; otherwise, her independence is
harmful to the society in all respects. This belief was applied in the Indian society of those days and led to the imposition of restrictions on women freedom. Therefore, the status of women in India especially in Hindu society degraded remarkably. Further, with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal Empire and later Christianity, women status took a bad shape. Although there were some reformatory movements such as Jainism who allowed women to be admitted to the religious order. During the medieval period position of Indian woman in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period when Sati among some communities, early marriages and a widow remarriages were banned a part of Indian society. Further to this, the Mughal entry into Indian subcontinent has brought purdah practice by women concealing the whole appearance of women to the public. Similarly, the Rajput’s of Rajasthan made the Jauhar among practice which has been another impediment on the movements of women. Polygamy among Hindu Kshatriya rulers, sexual exploitation of Devadasis or the temple women are some of the incidents of deterioration of women status. Many reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, JyotiraoPhule, etc., fight for the up liftmen of women and for their status during British rule. With the passage of time women’s role in the Indian society was well recognized by eminent people like Peary Charan Sarkar, a member of Young Bengal who started free school for girls in 1847 in a suburb of Calcutta. The first women delegation to the secretary of the State in 1979, demanded women political rights which were supported by Indian National Congress. The All India Women Education Conference held at Pune in 1927 and enactment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929 are some of the events that indicate the recognition of women in Indian society. With the efforts of Muhammad Ali Jinnah who started, Child Marriage Restraint Act, stipulating 14 years as the minimum age of marriage for the girl were appreciable steps. Though Mahatma Gandhi himself married at the age of thirteen, he later urged and suggested people to
boycott child marriages and called upon the young men to marry child widows. In India’s freedom struggle women played a significant role. Smt. Sarojini Naidu a freedom fighter and poet was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress. Later, she also became the first woman Governor of a State in India. Women in India now play an important role in all activities such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

The Indian Constitution guarantees equality to all Women (Article 14), no discrimination act (Article 15(1)), equal opportunity (Article 16), and equal salary (Article 39(d)). Special provisions in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42). Later, the feminist activism in India picked up momentum during later 1970s. In 1970s new women-oriented Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Self- Help Groups (SHGs) and NGOs such as Self Employment Women’s Association (SEWA) have played a vital role in women's rights in India. Many women acted as leaders of local movements 2001 was declared by the Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed on 9th March 2010, one day after International Women day, the upper house passed Women's Reservation Bill, which ensured thirty three per cent reservation to Indian women in Parliament and State Legislative Bodies.

MICROFINANCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Microfinance itself means the extension of very small loans (micro loans) to the unemployed poor entrepreneurs and poor women who are not bankable. They lack collateral,
employment and verifiable credit. Micro credits are a part of microfinance, which provides financial services to the very poor, apart from loans, it includes savings, micro insurance and other financial innovations which were organized by the developing countries for women to work independently and setup projects that helped them to generate an income and in many cases begin to build wealth and exit poverty. Micro credit has given women in India an opportunity to change their destiny. Poor women, who are a part of the micro credit movement in the country, use small loans to increase their economic activity, keeping in view the immense potential inherent in SHGs in savings mobilization and credit multiplication, banks are changing their trends to lend the poor and are considering micro credit as one of their important marketing avenues thereby facilitating to create a new market of micro credit. Thus it has now become a global initiative and is considered as an important agenda of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations. It is due to the importance of micro credit led the year 2005 was announced as the “International Year on Micro credit” to access and promote the contribution of micro finance towards achieving the MDG. The overall objective of MDGs is to reduce the poverty level to half of 1990 by 2015. (CGAP Report, 2002)

Microfinance has two types of effects on the members of the SHG, that it gives economic effects and social effects. While the micro credit system is economic in its basic structure, it is not limited to it in its various effects. More production increase the opportunity of employment. Besides that it also helps to decrease vulnerability of the SHGs by a lowering of subsidies because it has been noticed that the SHGs tend to become nonfunctional after they receive subsidies—whereas the SHGs who are not receiving subsidies are not facing to such problems. In recent years, empowerment of women has become a subject of great concern for the nations all over the world especially in poor and developing countries. Empowerment means participation of women in
harmonious co-existence with men in the society. Power provides social recognition, prosperity, dignity, property and security. Hence empowerment has acquired considerable importance. Empowerment is a way of acquiring the ability and opportunity to participate in decision making and implementation of decisions with proper knowledge of self-dignity and self-confidence. The concept ‘empowerment’ was introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985, where its definition was given as “a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women. Empowerment is not only essential in political field; but also in personal, social, economic and political dimensions with personal empowerment”. The declaration of the year 2001 as the "Women Empowerment Year" is therefore, significant as it reiterates the Government’s commitment to give equality for women in all walks of life. The microfinance has a potential of economic empowerment of women. It makes women socially and economically independent by providing financial resources in their hands. Socio Economic independence results in higher bargaining power to women in their communities and households, and other results in higher prestige and self-esteem. The microfinance has function to its potential to empower. Women entrepreneur play great role in rural economies, and it generates large percentage of micro-enterprises and other businesses field in developing countries are undertaken by women. Both urban and rural areas women successfully turning to self-generated employment in various fields like in small-scale enterprise activities in the informal sector to support their households

**SELF HELP GROUPS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The issues of empowerment of women has moved forward during the last three decades of the second millennia, mainly through the efforts of the United Nations when they declared 1975 as the women year and the decade 1975-82 as the women decade. At the same sixth plan started
in India and the approach was shifted from welfare to development and further efforts during the subsequent plans culminated in the farming of a National Policy for Empowerment Women approved by the cabinet on 20th March 2001. However, despite constitutional guarantee of equality and justice, legislative support of a plethora of acts and introduction of programmes and policies, the goals of gender equality and justice but the, empowerment of women still remains a distant dream for Indian women.

The human development index as calculated by the UNDP is based on three major components which are life expectancy at birth, literacy and per capita purchasing power. India gets 131\textsuperscript{th} rank among the 174 countries. Gender Development Index is also available for 143 countries in which India ranks 108. Indian scenario presents a bad picture on several key indicators contributing to human development. The first alarming signal is the falling sex ratio of women. As per the 2011 census, the sex ratio is 940 and it is a matter of disappointed that 0-6 yrs. group, the sex ratio is only 927. The poor health of women influenced low literacy profiles adversely affect their work participation rate and the resulting standard of living is low. Hence our Human Development Index contributes a major part regarding the welfare of women. Women are the bearers of the next generation, the care givers in the family. But they suffer every deprivation. They have to bear a lot of burden, attending to all domestic chores, fetching fuel, fodder and water; generally from long distances, working from dawn to dusk and yet are not able to get any recognition in national accounts. Even whenever they have some, they spend it all on the family and struggle to battle in poverty. Often they also finance the husband's 'leisure activities' like alcohol, only to be beaten when he is drunk.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite all our plans and efforts, female adult literacy in the country has just touched 65 percent in 2011. This resulted 35 percent of our women illiterate and unaware of their rights. It is
true that education open up new ways to women but education alone is not enough solve all problems. For the mass of our women it cannot be education of traditional kind. What they need, is training in vocation skills, coupled with a basic knowledge related to their local situations and awareness about their rights. Special incentives to encourage the education of girls in regular schools particularly in out rural areas and urban slums is the need hour. India, like any other developing countries has a large unorganized sector where a great no. of the women workers are found. This sector has been largely neglected in so far as provision of support services and social security benefits are concerned. Even the basic laws, like the Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Maternity Benefit Act, etc. have not benefited them. The enforcement machinery of the labor departments, has totally failed in giving. The central and state governments have over the years initiated several programmes to change the mindset of rural women with incentives to give women to live in dignity.\textsuperscript{14}

Participation in the freedom struggle brought political awareness among women. Reservations in the local bodies have ensured women entry into the political process at the grass root levels. There is now 33\% reservation in an Assemblies and Parliaments and the government is trying to pass the women reservation bills of 50\% in near future, to empower women and make it possible to give them leadership positions. But empowerment is important than political participation. Women have to be equipped to help themselves, they should be aware to their rights and enable to discover their own potential. Empowerment of women is a crucial factor in the eradication of poverty, as the women are the key contributors to the economy and in combating poverty through both remunerative and non-remunerative work at home and other work places.

Self Help Groups (SHGs)\textsuperscript{15} have emerged as the most successful strategy in the process of development and empowerment of women. Women SHGs in India have become successful in
making the participation of women possible in decision making. SHGs is viable organized setup to disburse micro credit among rural women and encourage them to get entrepreneurial ventures. The progress of any nation is directly linked with the social and economic condition of women in a particular country. Participation in SHGs would help to bring change and enhance in the standard of living of women which could be their empowerment in poor and developing nations. Self Help Group (SHG) is a process by which a group of 10-20 women with common objectives are motivated to come forward voluntarily to participate in the development activities like savings, credit and income generation and thereby ensure economic independence. The basic objective SHGs\textsuperscript{16} is to finance the poor and to achieve holistic empowerment. SHG phenomenon brings the following qualities: group consciousness among women, sense of belongingness, self-confidence and self-reliance. When a woman becomes a member of SHG, her sense of public participation and increase more participation in social activities, high self-esteem, self-respect and fulfillment in life become expanding. Thus, the SHGs can be an effective instrument to empower women socially and economically.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROFILE OF INDIAN WOMEN**

*(With special reference to Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir)*

Women and girls face limitless problems throughout the life cycle. They may face discrimination problem violence, harassment or abuse; negligence due to dependence and lack of access to resources; social prejudice; and exploitation – whether economic, political, social or religious. They are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination regardless of their position in the economic and social spectrum. Additionally, they become victims if they are poor, socially disadvantaged or live in a backward or remote area.
The empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. Empowerment is an active process which helps a woman to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the international women conference held in 1985 at Nairobi. The conference gave the definition of empowerment as a re-construction of social power and control of resources in favor of women. According to World Bank (2008), empowerment is increasing the capacity of individual or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Women empowerment gives power to a woman the control of power and resources and change women lives over time through their active participation. The Beijing Conference (1995) has listed the following obstacles that come in the way of empowerment of women.

- Increasing burden of poverty on women.
- Unequal access and insignificant educational opportunities.
- Lack of gender equality and employment.
- Lack of communication facilities. The Beijing Platform for Action spelled out two strategic objectives with regard to women empowerment.
- Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making with the help of media.
- Promote a balanced and non–stereotyped portrayal of women in media.

**STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

The status of women in India has to face many great challenges over the past few millennia. Many reforms were made for the upliftment of woman, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices including that of the president, the prime minister, and speaker of Lok Sabha, leader of the opposition, union ministers, chief
ministers and governors. Women in India is participating fully in the areas of education, sports, media, political, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as prime minister of India for an fifteen years, is the world’s longest serving women prime minister.

India is strongly connected to family relations. In India, the family is given a lot of importance, and in most of the country the family unit is patrilineal. Families are usually multi – generation, with the bride moving to line with the in-laves. Till this time families are usually hierarchical, with the elders having authority over the younger generations, and male over female. In India women population constitute almost half of total population. According to the Census 2011, male population was 623.7 million and female population was 586.5 million. The total literacy rate in rural India men 79 per cent, women 59 per cent and in urban men 90 per cent, women 80 per cent. Literacy rate has grown to some extent. The Indian literacy rate has grown to 74.04% (2011 census) from 12% at the end of British rule in 1947. This was a greater than six fold improvement, the literacy rate is well below level than world average literacy rate of 84% and of all nations, India currently has the largest world’s illiterate population. In spite of efforts of the government programmes, India's literacy rate increased only "sluggishly", and a 1990 study estimated that it would take until 2060 for India to achieve universal literacy at then-current rate of progress. The 2011 census, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is; less than the growth seen during the previous decade.

There is a great difference in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above)5 in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. As a result the low female literacy rate has had a negatively impact on family planning and population stabilization efforts in India. It is obvious from the studies that female literacy is a strong predictor of the use
of contraception among married Indian couples, even when women do not otherwise have economic independence. The census also shows positive indication about growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001–2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

Table 3.1
LITERACY RATE BY SEX - INDIA: 1951 TO 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.30</td>
<td>40.40</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.57</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64.84</td>
<td>75.26</td>
<td>53.67</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
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Source: Office of the Registrar General, India.

SEX RATIO IN INDIA

In India the male sex ratio has been changed and has continued to rise and expand in various forms. This has drawn wide attention of policy makers and planners to reverse the trend to bring it back to parity. The results of Census 2011, total population of India is 1,21,01,93,422 which comprises of 62, 37, 24,248 males and 58, 64, 69,174 females with the sex ratio of 940 females per 1000 males. But due to increasing socio-economic conditions sex ratio has improved in India.
Table 3.2
SEX RATIO (CENSUS -1901-2011)

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</table>


For the achievement of socio-economic conditions to achieve balanced economic growth with social justice in the states like Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, The microfinance institutions are trying to help the poor who has reached to poor people who have certain entitlements in the form of productive assets, education and skills; the possession of otherwise can generate incomes to by the food requirements and also the motive of Microfinance focuses on to help poorest families with very small loans (Micro-credit) either to engage them in productive activities or grow their tiny businesses. With the passage of time it has been realized that with the passage of time that the poor and very poor who lack access to traditional formal financial institutions require a verity of financial products. Poverty is an old and worldwide problem. It affects the quality of life of the people in the society in one form or other. The states M.P and J&K having a huge percentage of population living below poverty line. Some of the problems in M.P and J&K states are unemployment, underemployment, underdeveloped agricultural sectors, unbalanced development with huge regional imbalances, illiteracy, and shortage of capital &lack of entrepreneurships. Microfinance in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh is still in its initial stage. The formal sources like Public Sector Commercial Banks, Rural Regional Banks, District Cooperative Societies, and Private Sector Commercial Banks, providing microfinance services to few thousand SHGs formed under SHG-Bank Linkage Model initiated by NABARD in 1992. Jammu and Kashmir is lagging behind besides having treasure of natural
resources, due to its peculiar demographics and the political turmoil since last few decades. The several problems like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment remained unnoticed which has amplified over the past two decades due to the continuous uncertainty and neglect by government and other non-governmental agencies. Due to this result the State still has 21.63% of BPL Population (Directorate of Economics and statistics 2009-10) with financial exclusion largest among all other Northern States with about 68.2% of farmer households living in rural areas non-indebted and are deprived of financial services. Microfinance institutions are the need of the hour in M.P and J&K State because Female population of both the states is low as compared to average sex ratio of the country. In M.P as per the census 2011 the total population of M.P state is 72,597,565 in which the male population is 37,612,920 and the female population is 34,984,645 with the sex ratio of 930 as low compare to 940 average sex ratio of the country and total population of J&K State slashed down from 47.15% of the total population in 2001 to 46.88% in 2011. As per the reports from Census 2011, Jammu and Kashmir has population of 1.25 Crore souls over the figure of 1.01 Crore in 2001 census. Total population of Jammu & Kashmir as per 2011 census is 12,548,926 in which male population is 6,665,561 and female 5,883,365 which shows reduced sex ratio of 883. The corresponding figures of male and female as per Census 2001 were 5,360,926 and 4,782,774 respectively indicating sex ratio of 892. In female literacy rate the ratio of M. P and J&K is almost same 60.02 and 58.01 respectively is low as compared to average female literacy rate of country 65.46. Gender difference still exists both in rural and urban areas but it is comparatively higher in rural areas. This is due to a number of factors lack of access to schools, parents feeling insecure about sending girl children to schools, their engagement in agricultural and other domestic activities etc. the work of the microfinance is to help the millions of the poorest people of India. Microfinance shows huge impact on the lives of millions of poor people
particularly women in present world. Numerous scholars and NGOs are working for microfinance programme within the reach of poor people, who are still not benefited by the conventional banking system. It is obvious that microfinance is not important for all people but most groups can benefit from this idea. In this report, the researcher has tried to present evidence of the important contributions made by microfinance in empowerment of women by increasing the income generating activities, empowerment of poor people to access development services such as health and education, and reduction in vulnerability.

Communication is a mean to transmit messages to large vast areas and the process by which those messages are sought, used, understood, and influenced by audiences. Due to Modern communication media to be in touch make with millions of people throughout the world. Various organizations distribute messages that affect and reflect the cultures of society, provide information simultaneously to large heterogeneous audiences, making media part of society’s institutional forces. Media is a link between audience and the world. Denis Mc Quail (2000) suggests several metaphors to capture this idea:

Media are windows that enable us to see beyond our immediate surroundings.

- Interpreter that make sense of experience,
- Platforms that convey information,
- Interactive communication that includes audience feedback,
- Signposts which give us instructions and directions,
- Filters that screen out parts of experience and focus on others,
- Mirrors which reflect ourselves back to us,
- And barriers that block the truth.
The Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) are basic tools for the development of any society. The ICT consists of segments like TV, Radio, computers and mobile phones. ICT can also be met through the traditional means such as print media to be important to large number of people, particularly in rural area. New technologies are capable to meet the challenges for empowerment. Technology and communication go hand in hand. Nowadays, any information spreads from one part of the world to the other in a few seconds. Technological growth helps communication to develop very fast. The information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made their place in every aspect of human life today from community radios in the most rural parts of the globe to cellular phones in the hands of women and men in every community, to computers in almost every medium to large organization. ICTs have helped in knowledge sharing and knowledge gathering. ICTs can now reach unconnected individuals, families, and whole populations to understand their needs, opportunity and challenges.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Women leadership and effective participation is agenda of governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations, including women rights groups. Role of woman is important in development and decision making in various sectors of life. There is growing momentum among governments to foster and ensure women participation and leadership in governance structures. Providing quotas for women representation at different levels of governance is a good way to achieve this goal in many countries. In India, positive action for women and disadvantaged groups has been enshrined into the constitution. The Constitution (73rd Amendment Act), enacted in 1992 provides a minimum of one-third of seats for women (both as members and as chairpersons) within all of India’s locally elected governance bodies commonly referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In 2009, the Government of India approved a 50
per cent reservation for women in PRIs. Many states, including Rajasthan and Odisha, have passed similar legislation. The same amendment also calls for PRIs to “prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice.” Women political representation is an important step in democratizing and engendering local governance. However, it has not enough to ensure women leadership and their effective participation in local governance, as elected women representatives (EWRs), both members and Sarpanches, continue to face several institutional and social barriers. At the institutional level, the capacity of local governance structures to implement reforms, institutionalize accountability systems, decentralize functions and facilitate women active engagement plays a role in determining whether women are able to emerge as political agents and actors. Among the Social barriers lack of education, physical violence against women in the public and domestic spheres, and oppressive patriarchal and caste structures. Traditional power hierarchies are still in favor of men and they resist in giving space or recognition to women attempts to be part of the political scenario. Women Sarpanches who have made remarkable changes on behalf of their constituencies, it is widely acknowledged that generally EWRs face gender discrimination. The presence and participation of women in local governance does not mean they are problem free their grievances should be addressed by PRIs. Studies have highlighted that EWRs articulate and emphasize priorities that are different from men, although these priorities largely remain within the framework of development. Such priorities at best serve women practical gender needs and not their strategic gender interests. Women need social attention like health care and protection. Meeting these needs does not necessarily involve challenging women status in society or a focus on gender equity. However, these help in changing the women position in society rather than only improve their condition. Research shows that the success of panchayats in focusing on women strategic gender interests has been mixed. There have been some positive
initiatives for women, and instances of women chairpersons and members taking on cases of alcoholism and violence against women. Here are limited cases where there occurs woman rights violation. There is a need then to better understand how PRIs can become more engaged and proactive around strategic gender issues and provide spaces to promote gender equity within an overall framework of gender responsive governance.

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Women in many parts of India are traditionally deprived of land and property rights and often function as cheap labor or supplement their domestic chores as a farm hand. Women also are impacted particularly hard by climate change and the irresponsible use of natural resources, including the depletion of water sources. Women have to spend time in daily household work and have to spend less time to participate in income generating processes, undermining their education, health and productivity. Their situation is compounded by a male-dominated workforce at points of service delivery and by the fact that a large percentage of women do not access their entitlements, either because they are unaware of them, or, equally likely, dis-incentivized by prohibitively high transaction costs. The role of woman is seen as reproductive and domestic in support of the male bread earner of the family and these practices have conditioned women to accept a subservient role. The fact is that women, though remains absent from the formal workplace and hence play least role in the production of economy. Women are considered only reproducer but not producer and their efforts are always neglected by the family members. Economic independence is a major indicator for women empowerment. The various dimensions of economic empowerment of women are:

**a. Access to resources:** it is necessary that the rural women need to have control over limited resources like land and livestock, so that they could take decisions and implement them in any way
that is required. If they will have ownership and control over productive assets it will create a sense of belonging and owning.

b. **Access to input and Credit:** -access to productive resources is critical for enhancing women economic choices. Since, formal credit institutions rarely lend to the poor, special institutional arrangements should be made to extend credit to those who have no collateral to offer their enterprise. The policy challenges in to support effective grassroots credit schemes and intermediaries and ensure that low income women have assured credit from the formal financial system.

c. **Access to Cooperatives and local Women Organization:**-Collectivization has been recognized as a basic point for woman empowerment. It is a mean to bring a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity. Organizational efforts should be made for integrating rural women into development.

**SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

Empowering women contributes to social development. Social development in any country whether developed or underdeveloped could be achieved through economic progress.

a. **Status of women**- Every country has made efforts for developing women capabilities, but inequalities still prevails there between women and men. The low status of women is the outcome of a variety of causes in which patriarchal values reinforced by traditional media and other socio-political institution play a major role. Thus the institutional bases of women oppression have to be finished to accept the gender equality and the women perception of themselves would also need to be changed.

b. **Gender bias**- women played a significant role due to Cultural traditions and economic necessity. In India it is not uncommon that women do not have control over the land. Even, where
women constitute a large share of agricultural producers but, there are cultural constraints to mend the gap between men and women, because almost all extension workers are males. Therefore the role of agricultural extension worker is very significant. Cultural norms have to be addressed before we tackle other dimensions.

c. **Health and Nutrition**- health and nutrition are two very important basic needs for empowerment of rural women. For development process health sector an extensive as well as intensive “Health Education and Awareness Campaign” (HEAC) needs to be given topmost priority and it should mainly stress on nutritional education, benefits of immunization, family planning etc.

Hence women empowerment should be taken into consideration while devising various policies for rural and socio-economic development.

- As per Census 2011, workers constituted 39.79 per cent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 per cent. At All-India level the percentage share of females as cultivators, Agricultural laborers, workers in the household industry and other workers stood at 24.92, 18.56, 2.95 & 47.20 respectively.

- The percentage of female main workers that is 25.5 which shows an increase as compared to 14.68 reported in the 2001 Census.

- The Literacy rate amongst females was reported at 65.46% in 2011 census it was 82.14% which shows a fall.

- The State of Himachal Pradesh had the highest female work participation rate (44.8 %) whereas in Delhi it was only 10.6 %. Percentage of female main workers, female marginal workers and female other workers to total female population was 59.6, 40.4 and 29.2 respectively.
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