

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

It is around 1970s that the question of gender and gender relations began to occupy a critical place in development discourse. The need for a gender perspective of development issues not only drew attention from scholars and professionals but also led to the rise of several feminist movements throughout the world. Women's empowerment as a concept, problematic as well as a political strategy became crucial in the context of their development. The field of rural development has since then seen a tremendous growth in research related to gender perspective in such development. It is well established that various developmental efforts have generally bypassed women. *Development strategies are, therefore, being designed to reduce deprivation of women by adopting strategy of women's empowerment.* Empowerment of women has been conceived as a strategy for women's enhancing their capability to be at par with men. However, parameters for judging equity with men have often been debated among feminist circles. Different schools of feminism namely, the liberal, the radical and the socialist have developed over time with different ideologies. All the concepts have generated in the west and are difficult to apply directly in the context of poor rural Indian women. The socialist-feminist thoughts have some relevance for the said category of women whose existence is a continuous struggle against various forces related to the class structure. Therefore, empowerment of poor rural women has to be seen in their efforts to overcome various factors leading to their deprivation.

Households as the basic social units play a major role in the daily struggles of women's lives. The household provides most crucial inputs in learning the social norms. Socially constructed gender roles are also learnt in this process. The subordinate position of women is embedded within the socially constructed gender roles assigned to them. Empowerment of women is

the process of liberation from such subordination and achieving equity with men. Since social conditioning of women and reproduction of conditioned behaviour take place mostly within the household domain, the process of empowerment should be associated with redefining the social-equations within the household. An important dimension of inequities faced by women within the household is their deprivation from the due share of resources. Disparities in intra-household allocation of resources may result from social conditioning within the household as well as various external factors outside the household domain, which operate against women. This includes their lower social status, lack of control on productive resources and income out of those resources, denial of free access to the outside world, patriarchal bias in the public sphere, lack of security and so on. All these factors are inter-related. It is in this context that amelioration of women's condition is being linked to women's empowerment through various governmental and non-governmental interventions.

Concept of Empowerment

Although no precise definition of the term 'empowerment' is available it broadly describes the process of development through which any deprived group of people gains more control, through their organized action, on all those factors which determine their capabilities and functionings. The concept draws its origin from the theory of 'conscientization' advocated by Paulo Freire in course of analyzing the situation of the oppressed classes in general. As per Friere, the oppressors impose their choice on the oppressed through prescription and transform the consciousness of the oppressed so that they conform to that imposed choice. Thus, 'the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor' (Friere, 1972 : 23). The oppressed lives on borrowed consciousness, which only helps to perpetuate their status of domination by the oppressor. The first stage of transforming the oppressed-oppressor relationship is to develop consciousness and to critically reflect on their experience, to have objective perception of the

reality around them and to confront the reality with organized action. The oppressed learns to analyze various factors concerning their existence through their own consciousness and to challenge what the oppressor prescribes. Thus, they achieve a deeper understanding through action and reflection and a small achievement further enables them to take up bigger challenges. However, the process begins only after the level of consciousness reaches a critical limit as well as suitable organization is developed to translate their realization into concrete action.

Because of stratification in the society a dominant group emerges and their survival depends on continuing oppression of the rest. The dominant group, called the 'director society' by Freire (ibid), enjoys economic and political power and uses the same to dominate over the oppressed group, called the 'dependent society'. The dominant group remains at the helm of the society and prescribes various social practices to continue their supremacy and domination over others. Such domination is justified by using myths and myths are made to be internalized by the members of the 'dependent society' during their socialization. This ensures continuous submergence of the members of the 'dependent society' in status of ignorance or even false consciousness. This results in fatalistic attitude by the members of the 'dependent' society and passive acceptance of their sufferings. They are unable to protest their sufferings, which has been described as the 'culture of silence' by Friere (ibid).

Empowerment is thus conceived as the process of liberation from the status of domination and breaking the 'culture of silence'. Since such domination is achieved through economic, social and political powers, the empowerment process must encompass gaining control on all those spheres. Such process has dual aspects – reflection on their experience in the economic, social and political spheres by their own perception and organizing action to change the situation. Thus, one has to achieve the ability to properly perceive various existential factors and the power to challenge the prevailing economic, political and social orders. In this context, it is extremely important as to who

enjoys power to control resources, both authoritative and allocative, in the society. The structure of the society determines the authority and legitimacy and thus controls power sharing arrangement among various social groups. The capabilities and functionalities of any group of people depend on how much power they enjoy to influence various factors concerning their existence. Empowerment is the process of acquiring legitimacy and authority to influence various existential factors for gaining equality with others. Thus, empowerment also entails attaining more equality with the members of the dominant group. This implies to have a normative framework and within this framework, empowerment means working towards more symmetric relations in respect of authority and legitimacy, i.e., gaining more power within the society. Scholars like Weber, Gramsci, Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe have made detail analysis of various perspectives of power (Akerkar 1995 : WS-10). Power works through discourses and it does not work in a linear and centralized way. There is thus a dispersion of power and multiplication of space in which the same is exercised. Power can never be a zero sum game. Power emanates in discursive articulations and thus there cannot be a priori understanding of power as liberatory or repressive. In this understanding of power, empowerment ceases to be a simple redistribution of power or taking off the power from the oppressor. Thus, the empowerment is not a simple unidimensional process of taking away power from the dominant group. It is a complex process of advancement in multiple socio-political space by gaining more authority and legitimacy in respective spaces and influencing policy and action in one's favour. This necessitates access to knowledge and other resources for being able to analyse and assess their situation and to reflect on their condition. Development of critical consciousness and analytical power and ability to organize group actions are the essential components in the process of empowerment. 'Empowerment' as observed by Freire is the 'critical consciousness' which acts as the motor of cultural emancipation (Freire, 1974). According to him one can know only to the extent that one 'problematizes' the natural, social and historical reality in which he/she is immersed. The task of 'problematization' is to codify the reality into symbols, which can generate

critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relation with nature and social forces. Such ability of the individual or the group is crucial for their social and economic existence with dignity and liberty. Women in India, as a group, lack such ability and suffer from discrimination and subjugation on many counts. Empowerment of women, therefore, has to be understood in the appropriate context.

The term 'empowerment', has been widely used in the literature, programmes initiated by the Government as well as NGOs to mean more effective participation of the people at the grass root level. That requires removal of barriers to participation so that people may participate freely within the existing institutional arrangement to derive benefits meant for them. However, such concept of empowerment has been criticized as disabling as it puts excessive emphasis on formal institutional arrangement (Mohanty, 1995). It does not envisage any change in power structure of the society and shifts away the focus to seize power through struggle. Also, empowerment is essentially associated with development of critical consciousness, which does not flow out of formal institutional arrangement. According to Beteille, the concept of empowerment has more to do with a local context than with any sociological theory. Sociologists are mainly concerned with the cognate concepts such as power and authority rather than with empowerment. Referring to Weber's influential concept of power that includes coercion, domination and manipulation, Beteille observes that this concept of power refers to an asymmetrical relationship between empowerment and dis-empowerment¹. The issue of empowerment on the other hand can be raised in the context of social contradiction such as between hierarchical social order and democratic system. Empowerment, according to Beteille, is context driven (Beteille, 1999). Following Beteille, therefore, empowerment is conceptualized here as the development of critical consciousness of deprivation with reference to a

¹ Weber defines power as "the chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber, Max 1978: 926).

context, which is generated from ethnocentric and/or sociocentric causes². The context of the present study is the poor rural women, as they exist in India today.

Related Concepts of Equality and Justice

At a broader level, issues related to empowerment of women are intimately linked to aspects of equality and justice. Equality within the household has been studied in analytical form by many scholars in the field of economics as a resource allocation mechanism. But the problem of intra-household disparity is influenced by economic as well as cultural factors. The framework of entitlement in combination with the concept of capability provides a methodology to study both economic and non-economic dimension of the problem. Many scholars have analyzed issues related to equality among human beings (Nussbaum and Glover, 1995). To bring all human beings to a certain threshold level of well-being is an important goal of human development, even as there are wide variations among individuals on account of biological diversities, different personal traits as well as difference in economic and cultural context in which they exist. What differences between human beings will be relevant and will be tolerated as fair has been proposed by different theories of justice. Each theory identifies a space in which the positions of any two persons are to be compared. The space may be conceived as vectors, each element representing some aspect of life and in that case the theory also proposes how those should be combined to enable such comparison and sets different criteria on which equality has to be judged (Sen, 1995). The ideologies on which such comparisons are based vary from the extreme egalitarianism at the one end to the libertarianism view at the other end. The extreme kind of egalitarian view suggests that there should not be any criteria on which inequalities can be tolerated. This is clearly not tenable because of the existence of wide variation of individual characteristics in terms of their needs, choices, capabilities and so on and equality in one dimension will lead to

² Personal discussion with Ramkrishna Mukherjee.

inequality in other dimensions. The other end is the libertarian view, which values the autonomy of the individual more than the equality among them. The 'entitlement theory' of Nozick specifies a set of libertarian rights which every individual should hold (Nozick, 1974). An important element of this view of justice is to ensure that there is no interference from outside into any one's life. These are seen as negative freedom compared to the social liberal views of Rawls. The Rawlsian approach demands maximization of liberties for all in certain selected space and also prescribes a minimum level of those liberties in respect of all. It emphasize positive rights like the right to have some minimum quantity of primary goods by every individual (Rawl, 1971). Primary goods are those which every rational person would need for a good living and include income and wealth, freedom to choose one's occupation, basic liberties, some minimum level of education and so on. In the Rawlsian approach equality is a central issue. It demands equal liberty to have the primary goods. However, it places the rights to have those primary goods before the goods itself. The Utilitarian view has a different approach and it merely promotes maximization of total utilities without regard to how the same is distributed. The quality of human life is judged in this view by the extent of satisfaction of needs what people themselves think important which is not linked to any normative basis of human functionings. The main problem in this approach is that one may feel satisfied with even what is unable to meet some normative specification of basic needs and functionings. In reality, false consciousness developed due to cultural conditioning and economic deprivation often leads to such situation. Sen proposes the capability theory of justice in which people are judged in terms of their freedom to achieve rather than in terms of primary goods or incomes or any other proposed space. Individual achievement is seen in terms of human functionings, consisting of various beings and doings. Those varies from elementary matters like being adequately nourished, avoiding escapable morbidity to more complex functioning like participation in community life, ability to assess one's environment and so on (Sen, 1995). As per Sen, the most inclusive or general capability would be the capability to function well. He also distinguishes between the well-being and agency dimensions of every

individual in guiding their functionings. Sen views capabilities not as powers of the persons that might or might not be realized in different situations but rather as options for actions. Nussbaum proposes a slightly different view. She emphasizes on internal capabilities, which to be nurtured and developed to reach one's full potential. She also lists some set of basic functionings, a threshold level of which should be achieved by developing internal capabilities as well as providing enabling environment (Nussbaum, 1995). Capability is concerned with the potential for achieving a set of functionings as per one's own choice. Human beings should have freedom to choose various combinations of functionings, i.e., of being and doings. The extent of freedom depends on the number of options from which one has to choose and the same may also be described as the size of the capability set. The goal for human development in the capability approach is to widen the capability set so that people have a wider freedom to choose. Such freedom may be positive which leads to more options to choose for achieving a wider range of functionings as well as negative freedom in not being disturbed by others while exercising the choice. David Crocker raises the issue of how to decide which life is more valuable between two human beings with one having superior capability and the other with relatively superior functionings. The first one has a higher potential to achieve but performs badly as per his or her own choice. The other had relatively lower potential but fully utilizes that to achieve higher level of functionings. David Crocker has analyzed the difference between the approaches between Sen & Nussbaum and opines that 'Sen, a more of a liberal, will rank positive freedom and capability more highly than actual achievement and Nussbaum, more of an Aristotelian, will put achievement first' (Crocker, 1995, 180). As far as the society or the governance is concerned the central issue is the capability. A just social arrangement should provide scope for every individual to achieve the capability for reaching some threshold level of functionings. Once the same is assured, it is for the individual to exercise his or her option to actually achieve any level of functionings up to his or her own choice. Inequalities, which exist in the society, should be judged on the basis of the failure of the existing social arrangement to provide minimum level of

capabilities to all and/or the failure of the individual who fails in not utilizing own capabilities for achieving the desired level of functionings. It is argued that in the context of the rural women in India, it is a failure originating from the structure of the society, which deprives them to achieve a minimum level of functioning. This aspect will be elaborated later in due course.

Although, different theories of justice compare equality of individual on different selected spaces, a few things are common. First of all, any difference between individuals is to be tolerated only on some objective criteria which is fair and secondly the opportunity to reach some minimum threshold level of functionings for living a good life should be available to all. Also, none of the theories identifies any criteria on which inequalities are to be tolerated on the basis of gender. On the other hand the biological difference between men and women should require women to have more amount of primary goods for achieving the same amount of well-being. For example, nursing mothers will have higher level of nutritional requirement. So, women should have been in a more advantageous position about distribution of at least some of the primary goods. Yet, empirical research has brought out existence of gender based inequality and deprivation of women to a large extent (Govt. of India, 1974, The World Bank, 1991, The Human Development Report, 2000). For example, difference in achievement in basic human functionings like remaining free from avoidable morbidity is so large between men and women that life expectancy of women has remained much lower than that of men in India. Achievement of women lags far behind that of men in almost every aspect of human functionings, which are valued. Genesis of those inequalities is rooted in male domination in the society through the institution of patriarchy.

While it is rational to examine the extent of inequality in any society on the basis of a normative approach supported by any particular theory of justice, it is also relevant to examine how any member of the society judges the same by his or her own criteria. Any social arrangement where a section of the members consider the same to be unjust as per their own criteria is clearly not

sustainable over a long period. The question of legitimacy becomes relevant in this context. The process of socialization inculcates different norms for legitimacy. Particularly the women feel it illegitimate to perceive their needs for primary goods at par with their male counterpart. So what they presumed to be a just social arrangement may in fact be a very unjust and unequal social arrangement when judged in terms of rational basis of equality in any space. In fact, women may not be in a position to achieve higher level of well-being even with adequate supply of primary goods, which are merely means for achieving well-being, because of the legitimacy factor. So, what is theoretically possible is not achievable in practice because of existence of perceptual constraints. Thus, the utilitarianism theory of justice fails miserably to have proper understanding of gender inequality because the deprivation of women and their inferior social position lead to expectation of a lower level of well-being. The Rawlsian theory of justice is also not fully applicable in such cases because fairness should demand comparison on achievement rather than supply of primary goods. The capability approach is, therefore, more appropriate to analyze and understand gender inequality and the space in which equality should be demanded are the capabilities and functionings.

The capability of an individual is associated with the extent of freedom that one enjoys and the possible alternative combinations of functionings that may be chosen. The functionings are the actual set of beings and doings, which are achieved. There is controversy among scholars as to whether 'freedom to achieve' or the 'actual achievement' should be the yardstick for measuring equality. It is argued here that both are important in the relevant context. When gender equality is being analysed in the context of all women, it is the capabilities between the members of the two sexes that are relevant. In the context of an individual, it is functioning, which ultimately decides how one is performing.



Inequality in the Framework of Entitlement – Linkage with Capability & Functioning

It has been argued in the previous section that the most rational way of comparing equality is in the space of capability and functioning. Actual functioning depends on the capacity of the individual to utilise the goods and services available under his or her command in a gainful manner. For example, some one having a degree in medicine may utilise the same to act as a doctor. Thus, his or her functioning as a doctor depends on whether he or she utilized the acquired knowledge and skill. If the individual with that knowledge decides not to function as a doctor but to pursue a career on literature the potential remain as his or her capability though not exercised as a functioning. *Therefore, capability depends not only on the command one has on the goods and services but also on the individual factor to convert the same to some useful functioning.* The set of possible conversion of the goods and services is the capability set. Therefore, it depends on a conversion function, and the command over goods and services, which is normally called the entitlement set. The entitlement set again depends on how the endowment of the individual is exchanged in the commodity market. The endowment of the individual is the various resources like ability to give labour, possession of skill, capital, charisma, social position etc. Entitlement of the individual is the bundle of goods and services he or she can obtain in exchange of his or her endowment. This concept was developed by Sen in the context of analysing hunger and the same has been used by other scholars in the field of gender analysis. Thus the starting point is the endowment of the individual which in exchange gives the *command of goods and services*. The same is again utilised to have a capability set and a point in that set is the actual functioning of the individual. Gender based inequality is built up in each stage – i.e., in difference in endowment, difference in entitlement in exchange of the endowment and in efficiency of conversion of the goods and services into actual functioning. The ultimate inequality that women would face is the product of each of the above process of

transformation. The various aspects of such inequality in each stage are discussed below.

Endowment of an individual can be visualized as a N-dimensional vector with each dimension representing certain quality, which individual may possess and which on exchange entitles one to have command of a bundle of goods and services. The endowment could be the ability to produce labour skilled or unskilled, possession of assets like land, capital, position in religious or social institutions, charisma etc. Possession of these by itself does not guarantee any goods or services that may be consumed or utilised for good living. The endowments are to be exchanged at rates decided by the economic, legal, cultural and political characteristics of the society. This transformation of the endowment vector to another vector space comprising the goods and services, which are consumed or utilised, is called the entitlement-mapping. This is the bundle of goods and services over which a person has hold. The concept has been extended later to also include such goods and services, which are received not through such exchange but are received from public institutions. Such services could be free primary education, social security, free preventive health care etc, which are meant for each citizen. These are exchange independent entitlements. Actual consumption of these is, however, dependent on other factors. It is rather easier to understand such exchange-entitlement in the market or in the public sphere. Within the household one may still think of entitlement of individual member based on the cultural norms and the characteristics of the household. The entitlement of the household is to be shared by individual members for which the mechanism is quite different. Allocation mechanism within the household has been analyzed based on different models. The simplest model is to consider the head of the household as an altruist who allocates resources to different members to maximize individual well- being. However, the appreciation of individual need is done as per his or her perception, which is often biased. The other model assumes an 'as if market' situation to decide the exchange within the household. The

bargaining model is the most widely accepted one to understand the household allocation mechanism.

Bargaining Theory as a Framework for Household Choice

This model visualizes the household allocation as a problem of bargaining. It has the advantage that it takes care of the conflict between the members. For simplicity the household is presumed to have two members who have concern for each other. It is also presumed that there is a cooperative infrastructure, provided by various social institutions, which ensures that the two members would try to be together till any one reaches such a low level of well-being, called the breakdown point, that he or she would remain better outside this arrangement. The solution of a mathematical model of this problem was worked by Nash (Nash, 1953). The solution predicts that if both of them cooperate to maximize their combined well-being, the share of their individual gain in well-being will be equal. It presumes that both of them have equal bargaining power. Most often the situation on the ground will be far from such equal sharing. This is because the two members hardly enjoy equal bargaining power. Various cultural and economic realities shape the perception of the members and difference in perceptions leads to unequal sharing. Therefore, perceptions of the individual member play very crucial role in this process of bargaining. Taking the perception factor into account the broad features of the outcome of the bargaining will depend on the following three propositions (Sen, 1990).

1) Breakdown well-being response: Each member, depending on his or her perception, allows own share to come down to a certain limit beyond which he or she would do better by living alone. This breakdown level of well-being is different for the two persons. At other points the well-being level of the person, whose well being is worse at the breakdown point, will be less favourable.

2) Perceived interest response: Perceived self-interest is an important determinant in deciding the respective sharing out of bargaining. If any member

puts less value to his or her own well-being, the solution will be less favourable to him.

3) Perceived contribution response: If any member perceived that he or she is making a larger contribution in having command over goods and services available to the household then the solution will be more favourable to him.

The first proposition decides the relative levels of well-being at the breakdown point, which is the fall back position. This depends on what will be the exchange entitlement of the individual if he or she breaks away and also include private or public support one receives after he or she decides to break away. For a woman this includes support she would receive from parent, brothers or other kin as well as social security provided by the state. It may even include the alternative of a formal divorce and remarriage. In fact remarriage is often the option exercised by the male members while the female members, in India, are generally debarred from taking such decisions, which further weakens their fall back position. Another factor that decides the breakdown response is the threat and actual use of physical violence. A distinction has been made by Agnihotri between 'physical security' and 'exchange security' (Agnihotri, 1992). A woman with high exchange security might face physical insecurity. Also, physical security is not always biologically decided. Social practices are the dominant factor in this case. The second and the third propositions result in modulation of respective shares by certain factors: Kanbur and Haddad made further analysis to arrive at the following simple observations (Haddad, L. and Kanbur, R, 1994):

1) The inequality in sharing of well-being decreases with increase in household resources.

2) The difference of inequality in well-being of the two individuals at the optimal level is directly proportional to the inequality at the breakdown point.

In practice every individual also receives some exchange independent entitlement. These are goods provided directly for consumption without any

interference or sharing. Public utilities, which are unmediated, come in this category. It implies that a stronger component of unmediated entitlement through public institutions reduces the inequality.

Considering the above analysis the following general observations can be made about inequality in allocation of resources between two members of a model household and hence their relative well-beings.

1) The well-being level at the breakdown point is an important determinant of inequality at the optimal level.

2) As the two members cooperate to create resources for the household, the inequality tends to decrease.

3) The extent of inequality is decided by their perceived self-interest and perceived contribution.

4) Presence of a strong component of exchange independent entitlement reduces inequality.

The first argument may also be extended to the respective entitlement position at the beginning of formation of the household, i.e., union through marriage. If the marriage is between two equally placed man and woman having equal entitlement vectors then they will have equal share of all the household resources. When it comes to gender inequality the same is built in the process of formation of the household itself through marriage between two socially unequal partners. There are also wide differences in levels of education, exposure and age. Apart from these the other factors are the difference in their individual exchange entitlement in the outside sphere, the difference in socially constructed perceptions between the husband and the wife and the difference in social environment. The latter arises because the husband is in his own environment, while the wife is a new comer yet to be assimilated in the family of the in-laws. Also, socially superior position of the husband's family and dowry has important consequence. All these points can be understood intuitively. However, those provide important clues on various aspects of inequality. The second point has important implication in the context

of the poor rural household. There is very little creation of net resources in those households and in that case, given other things same, inequalities remain high and the women continues to suffer deprivation of even primary goods like food essential for survival. The third point is most crucial from sociological point of view. Social construction of gendered perception may create a wide difference in well-being, given other things the same. Presence of a strong component of exchange independent entitlement to reduce inequality demands adoption of suitable policy to provide unmediated access to such goods and services through public intervention. Various state-sponsored social security measures come under this fold.

As already mentioned entitlement merely gives the command over goods and services that one enjoys. The ultimate outcome on which the life is to be judged is the outcome of how the entitlements are converted into well-being. Inequalities have been examined by many scholars in the space of entitlement and independent of that in the space of capability and functioning. Agnihotri has attempted linkage of the two approaches (ibid). The entitlement-mapping gives the command over a bundle of goods and services depending on one's endowment. The vector representing the goods and services under one's command, which also include any exchange independent component is converted to various types of beings and doings. This transformation thus leads to another vector in the space of beings and doings, which is known as the capability set. All possible combinations of beings and doings, each of which represents one point in the capability space is not simultaneously attainable. Also, the conversion efficiency varies from one person to another because of biological and intellectual diversities as well as the social contexts in which the people are placed. Therefore, two persons enjoying identical entitlement vector may have different capability sets. The number of points in the capability set represent the freedom one enjoys. Eventually one of the possible outcome is selected which is the state of functioning of the individual. The ultimate objective is to function well on a normative basis, i.e., free from any perceptual prejudice. Another very important outcome of the linkage as established above

is the cyclic process of reinforcing the inequality because of feedback from the functioning to the endowment. Because of difference in functioning the change in endowment of different individual varies. For example, a literate person who access new knowledge by reading may be further endowed to have greater exchange entitlement, which further improves his or her capability and functioning. An illiterate person has nothing to add to his knowledge base at least through reading, which further aggravates the inequality. Therefore, inequality in functioning may keep on increasing throughout the life cycle because of such feedback.

It transpires from all the above analyses that difference in outcome through their functioning is the result of a possible chain of inequalities in endowment, entitlement and the individual factors which convert the entitlement into status of beings and doings. Genesis of difference in functionings and capabilities of the two sexes should be traced to all the possible elements in that chain. The capability set, which decides the possible sets of functionings, is very limited for women, particularly those living in rural areas because of various social, cultural, legal and economic factors. In fact women have very little options to choose. As child they are socialized with the sole objective to get married and they learn what are socially relevant to the housewives who are confined within the domestic spheres. The well-being needs are suppressed by promoting the agency role in the in-law's family. It results in cultural conditioning of the perceived self-interest. In terms of actual functioning also they suffer from many constraints imposed by the society. The range of functioning gets severely restricted particularly due to outside - inside dichotomy (The World Bank, 1991). This results in shrinkage of the potential capability set because of the social and cultural veil and has been little explored in the literature. For example, a woman having good educational background though capable of taking any outside job may not be permitted by the superiors of the marital household to do so because of cultural factors. The same woman if start living away from her extended family in a different place may actually utilised her capability. The social institution outside home and the economic

infrastructure may also act as barriers. The same is aggravated by poverty, lack of independent income, illiteracy, ill health and burden of children. The process of coming out from this severely constrained situation, therefore, depends on improvement in all the spheres. This entails reducing the social barriers to provide for more freedom to choose and relieving them from their drudgeries and family burden. Augmenting their endowment, entitlement and capabilities and improving social and economic infrastructure are, therefore, extremely relevant for well-being of women. The next sections explore the various cultural, economic and structural factors, which operate against women and thereby impair their well-being.

Social Construction of Gender and Sub-ordination of Women

There is little evidence of any significant deprivation based on gender in the primitive and classless societies. Women's subordination and associated deprivation is linked to growth of family and erosion of collective ownership and communal economy. With settled agriculture and generation of surplus the roles and responsibilities started getting differentiated. Hierarchy of male evolved in this process, which has been explored by many scholars such as Goody (1990), Huber (1991) and Harriss (1993). Views of the scholars differ in genesis of the process. Whatever may be the reason, the male domination had to be sustained through social prescription of different roles and responsibilities for men and women. Subordination of women is a common feature of almost all stages of history and the same is prevalent in large parts of the world. Hinduism supported extreme form of female subordination through 'Brahminic Patriarchy'. Such patriarchy was graded through its linkage with the caste system. The 'Manusmriti' emphasized the control over the women within the household. The 'Arthashastra' promoted state patriarchy to achieve interest of the state, which gave some space to the lower caste women in the public sphere (Mukherjee, 1978; Chakraborty, 1993; Omvedt, 2000). Subordination of women in both the spheres have continued in various forms. This process has been sustained through the social construction of gender, which is embedded in

the interlocking cultural, economic and kinship structure and sexual division of labour. The patriarchal society prescribes norms for either sex, which are to be internalized from their childhood as a part of the socialization process. This also acts as a form of social control (Davidson and Gordon, 1979). Authorities, roles, responsibilities and status assigned by the society are based on gender. The traditional patrilocal and patrilineal joint family system in India confined women's role within the domestic sphere. Hinduism provided conflicting role to the women. While on one side the wife was totally subordinate to the husband, on the other side the husband was religiously incomplete without the wife. Even some rituals for the welfare of the household put women in a more prominent position (Srinivas, 1996). However, such prominence was given only where it was more convenient to the male. Also, respect for women was conditional to strict observance of cultural norms. These traditions have continued in some form or the other. They live in their own world segregated from the public sphere and have very little control of economic assets. Thus they are socially subordinate and economically dependent on men. This unequal gender relation results in persistence of extra-ordinary high level of gender inequality and female deprivation. It also leads to other social failures. Deprivation of women is so pervasive that often the same is taken as granted and remains invisible.

The difference in gender role is perpetuated through appropriate socialization of boys and girls considering their future roles as adults. One very important factor, which result differential treatment of boys and girls is the patrilocal system of marriage and patrilineal system of inheritance. The boy will remain at home to look after the parents and the girl will ultimately belong to another family. Differential socialization of boys and girls have been documented in several studies (Kanhere, 1989). The outcome is the male bias in access to education, nutrition, health care and acquisition of skill for improving one's endowment. Empirical studies have also proved that parent's gender-role stereotypes leads to different perceptions based on sex about the child's performance in various activities (Eccles et al, 1993). Such inequality

arises out of difference in roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. Biological differences between the two sexes is not adequate to explain the difference in gender roles and that is also the reason why the same varies widely from one society to another as well as the changes over time. Based on understanding of genesis of women's subordination different paths have been followed for liberation of women. Three different streams can be clearly distinguished based on such ideological position about genesis of women subordination and how the same may be mitigated (Desai and Krishnaraj, 1990). These are; 1) Liberal feminism, 2) Radical feminism and 3) Social feminism. The liberal feminism is based on supremacy of individual liberty and women are expected to enjoy all the rights enjoyed by men. However, the basic patriarchal structure of the society of differential roles and responsibilities of women is accepted. This was the view taken by the reformist in the 19th century in India. The radical feminists challenge the basic patriarchal structure of the society and the family and deny accepting any sex role differentiation. Even the existence of family and its continuation through socialization of the children raised by the nuclear family is challenged. This is an extreme view, generated in the West and has little acceptance in the Indian context. The third school of social feminism puts the genesis of female subordination on the class structure as well as on the patriarchy. The Marxist theory fails to reconcile the two and search is on to find an acceptable unified theory. The social feminists correctly raised the issues of exploitation within the household and its implication in the public economy. This debate is discussed in the next section. In the context of rural women in India this theory is more appropriate to find answer to the possible ways of liberating the women from class based as well as gender based oppressions. The production of life in the rural areas of India and relationship of women with the society as well as the ecology has its own features. The same is very complex and that also varies over time, ethnicity and region. The gender-based oppression has to be analysed in its specific context to understand the nature of subordination.

Sexual Division of Labour Within the Household

One important mechanism for continuation of women's sub-ordination is the sexual division of labour (Beneria, 1982; Majumder & Sharma, 1990; Banerjee, 1995). The division primarily arises from the socially assigned role for men as breadwinner and that for women as homemaker. Women are associated with the task of reproduction and subsistence production at home and men are associated with work outside home. Domestic labour, which is left for women, is assigned low status in the hierarchy of labour. The output of women's labour is used to satisfy personal consumption needs within the household. Such labour remains invisible and is unpaid. Therefore contribution of women in this process is less appreciated. Women practically share the entire responsibilities of work, which are done inside the home. Women belonging to very poor household are compelled to take up outside work. The inside-outside dichotomy is flexible in that sense. Higher the financial and social position of the household there is more shrinkage of the inside world. These are culturally determined and even those who work physically outside have symbolic 'boundaries' (Bennet, 1992). While women are taking more and more activities outside the household, their responsibility for doing reproductive works within the household has undergone little change. So, there has been more change of sexual division of labour between men and women in the outside world compared to that within the household domain. For women in poor rural household this amounts to double burden of work. Women who go out to work outside home face gender stereotyping and their economic roles are obscured. The sexual division of labour may also be broadly divided in two categories – the social and sectoral division of labour. In the social division of labour all domestic chores are assigned to women throughout the world. Sectoral division of labour refers to particular section of the economy and there exists a hierarchical division of labour between the two sexes. Nature of division in the later category varies more widely over region and time. However, in all cases such division ensures subordinate position of women. Also, the same work like cooking, sewing etc, which is assigned to women in the domestic sphere

becomes male preserve when the work is performed in the public sphere. In the rural society where there is very little development of market, a lot of labour is devoted to convert the agricultural outputs into something edible, which provide essential nutrients. Much labour of women within the domestic sphere is devoted to support agriculture and allied activities. All those activities are generally non-monetized. While achievement of men can be measured in terms of their ability to earn that of women cannot be easily measured in terms of their ability to perform reproductive roles. No positive value is attached to such performance of women. However, their failure to discharge that role is severely criticized.

Women's labour within the household has received less attention of the scholars till the late 60's. Marx's attention was almost entirely focussed on what the British feminist author Glucksmann has termed 'public economy'. The 'domestic economy', its transformation along with the growth of capitalist relations, and the mutual influence of changes in the public and domestic economy did not constitute an intrinsic part of Marx's analysis (Custers, 1997). A serious debate on household labour has been initiated from the late 1960s. Prior to that economic theories failed to fully understand women's labouring activities. Even, 'Marx did not give recognition to the labour performed by women as housewives, and that he basically looked upon the sexual division of labour as naturally given' (Custers, 1997 : 50). Feminist theoreticians from late 1960s and early 1970s started challenging the Marxian assumption about unproductive character of domestic labour. They argued that women's domestic labour is crucial for reproduction of labour power, which is exchanged in the market. So, domestic labour not only creates use values for ready consumption but also creates exchange value by renewing exchangeable labour power through their maintenance and reproductive activities. While one school of feminist is of the opinion that domestic economy is a separate entity from public economy each having its own characteristic scholar like Miriam Glucksmann argues that those two spheres of economy are closely intertwined and those two sectors form an integrated whole (Custers, 1997). So women's

reproductive labour cannot be isolated from the labour performed and exchanged in the public economy. The other area of debate is how women's reproductive labour power is exploited.

The conventional view is that women's labour power is controlled by men through the institution of patriarchy. In the traditional patriarchal family the male peasant head controlled the family's land, cattle and instruments and divided the labouring work among its members. Marx argued that patriarchal force would decline with growth of female employment in industries since they would become independent wage earner. Various feminist scholars have criticized this view. The views of the radical feminist are that all existing social systems are characterized first and foremost by men's domination over women. Class issues are seen as secondary to them. The socialist feminists differ on the meaning of patriarchy and its relation to class. This view rightly questions the proposition of the radical feminist that all energy of women should be directed for a battle against all men. Socialist feminist admits that male dominance takes many forms and men's control over women labour power is common in all forms. Also, women's relations with means of production are generally different from that of men's. One particular area of interest is how women's labour is controlled by men, even in households which are assetless. It is argued here that men need little material base to control women's labour. Such control is achieved through patriarchal values of male supremacy. Gendered perception plays a very crucial role in this respect.

The household can not be treated similar to a market where everything is decided in exchange of labour or other goods and services. The household also produces intangible goods, which is not exchanged like other goods and services. Love, loyalty, sacrifice, satisfaction etc. are not always exchangeable or marketable. This aspect of the household seems to be rather ignored in the literature. Whatever is available in a household is also available component-wise in the market. Thus, food, shelter, health care to the ailing person etc. are all available in exchange in the market. What is missing there is the warmth,

which is available at home. It is not the women's labour alone, dissociated from those intangible considerations, which create this warmth. This aspect of life is difficult to explain through the concepts of 'exchange', 'exploitation' or even 'subordination' of one by the other. This warmth of the household binds people to stay together and provides motivation to live. There is no doubt that there is exploitation of women's labour as explained in the previous section in terms of availability or denial of tangible goods. When it comes to intangible goods it is difficult to say whether there is inequity and how the same can be judged. It is important to know how the intangible aspect of the household, which gives its warmth, can be enhanced while abolishing inequity in the tangible aspects. This is apparently difficult to achieve as evidenced by more rapid disintegration of the households in the western world with more freedom and equity among members of the society. Whether this process enhances social well-being is also debatable.

Women's Role as Economic Producer

Women's role as economic producer was brought to focus by Boserup in her pioneering analysis of women's role in agriculture (Boserup, 1970). A lot of research has been since conducted on the economic role of women. A common finding is that women's role as economic producer is undermined by distortions and biases in information gathering and women are projected as non-workers. Even NSS data in India fails to take notice of the sharp seasonal variations in the labour force participation rates, which is more prominent for women (Govt. of India, 1974). The Committee on the status of women in India found a long term declining trend in economic participation of women both in terms of percentage of workers to total female population and in their percentage to the total labour force after 1921. The participation of women in the industry, however, showed a general stagnation and decline after 1961. The process of modernization of industries had adverse impact on the participation of women as labourer. The traditional home based industries declined rapidly. With technological up-gradation it was the women, who provided unskilled

labour, faced lower demand. Wherever labour force had to be reduced it was the women who were preferred for taking out of the role. Women in rural area remained mostly engaged in agriculture as unskilled labour. Also, agriculture continued to receive the burden of the surplus labour force. The unorganized nature of farm labour and its seasonal nature not only kept the wage low but women as a whole also faced severe wage discrimination. In earlier times, the regional variations in wage rates were probably influenced by cultural variations in attitudes to women's work. The situation has improved in recent years although mild discrimination continues in many parts of the country. Women's participation in the organized sector has been low. Also, growth of women's employment in organized private sector has been slower than that in the public sector, which is an area of concern.

Work force participation of women in India are stratified on two counts – by social hierarchy and by asset inequality (Berrman, 1979). The process of sanskritization leads to withdrawal of women from working outside home for providing labour within the domestic sphere. Section of the society, which permits outside employment of women, is appropriately located in the class and caste hierarchy depending on the nature of work. At the lower end, the assetless families with low social position take up employment, which are generally ill paid, insecure, devoid of any recognized skill and with feminine attributes. Most of the working rural women fall under this category. They are subjected to less patriarchal restriction within the household. However, many of them bear the brunt of social patriarchy (Bardhan, 1985). Women, who have some access to urban markets, are also engaged in household production and petty trade. However, mechanism for subordinating women labour in both the modes of production, i.e., farm production and household production is quite similar. Such subordination is achieved by male control on land, means of production, capital, marketing outlet and investment decisions. In the former case the mechanism is more cultural with division of labour appropriate for women and female propriety. In the latter case the mechanism is more organizational through fragmentation of work, presence of intermediaries,

isolation of workers. However, there is always mutual reinforcement of these factors. Thus, women engaged in house based production are often thought to be subsidiary earner with little demand for money even when she is the principle earner (Mies, 1982). The other common feature is that the workers are highly unorganized and isolated. As the economic condition of the household improves there is withdrawal of women from labour force. They are engaged in status production work within the domestic sphere (Papanek, 1990). With increase in educational qualification there is the impact of Westernization by which women reenter outside work following the ways of urban educated elite.

Economic work of women through higher female labour force participation is an important determinant of their status in the society. However, such status depends on the nature of work and the compulsion to participate in that work. Idleness of educated women is one consequence of such consideration because many educated women refrain from joining the employment market voluntarily on cultural considerations. The most important question is whether participation of women in the labour force improves their functioning. One immediate outcome of more participation of women, at the low end of the spectrum, in outside production is the double burden of work. Even those who are engaged in household production have to keep a long day. Whether such participation leads to more voice in decision making, better share of family resources is a key question. The answer is not always favourable (Bardhan, 1985).

Agency Role of Women

Pervasive inequalities that women face are sustained by cultural conditioning of women. Well-being of women cannot be augmented by any passive mechanism for increasing their share of resources. The agency aspect of women, i.e., how they themselves perceive their roles and responsibilities and thereby possible functionings is therefore extremely important. Such agency

aspects include what women think as their responsibilities as wife, mother or daughter-in-law and so on. The cultural norm, the women imbibe, is to play their agency roles for maximising well-being of the male member, i.e., for the husband by the wife, for the son by the mother and all the other superior male members by the daughter-in-law in a joint family. Individual well-being is sacrificed or compromised to achieve different aspects of agency well-being. Those aspects are guided by the patriarchal norms. Women are socialized not to question those norms but to accept the social prescription. Since their individual well-being becomes secondary they do not perceive to receive due share of goods and services available to the household. At the same time, the social prescription makes them to perceive their contribution in creating wealth for the household at a much lower level. As already explained these agency role lowers down their bargaining power and their physical well-beings get reduced. However, some of the agency roles of women are important in promoting social well-being such as survival of children. Such agency roles are enhanced by female literacy (Dreze and Sen, 1995). Similarly, the drive for literacy in the recent years has seen many successful campaigns against consumption of liquor. The agency aspect of women can play a strong role in transformation of the society in a better direction.

The Institution of Marriage and the Intra-household Dimension

The patrilocal system of marriage is most widely practiced in India particularly in the northern side of the Bindhyas. This system has its influence on the position of women in the household and the intra-household relationship. There are empirical evidences to show that, social and physical proximity of natal kin has important implications for their access to health care (Kumar, 1999). The difference in kinship system and marriage rules leads to substantial difference in access to resource and autonomy of women (Dyson and Moore, 1983). The girls are married at a very young age and they have to adapt the cultural norms of the households to which they are married. Their well-being depends substantially on their compliance to those norms and practices.

Spatially exogamous system of marriage is followed in most part of the Northern as well as in the Eastern India. The bride in those areas is unable to visit her natal household at her will and to seek the protection of her parents as and when needed because of social sanction. Her socialization prior to marriage and the situation she faces at the in law's place puts her in a position, which promotes compliance. The situation is worse in rural areas where the age at marriage of girls is much lower. The young husband usually has little economic independence because of his lower age and the income is mostly from traditional land-based activities, ownership of which rests with the male head of the household. Dowry is another dimension of bringing inequality between men and women right at the beginning of the formation of the household (Kapadia, 1994). It also adversely affects the status of the girl child, who is perceived as a liability. Intra-household relationship is presumed to be less harsh for women where the bride starts living with the husband and away from the in-laws and other members of the husband's family. In ordinary families the bride is seen as the service provider to the members of the husband's family and she adapts herself to take care of all their reproductive needs. Rituals and rites prescribed for Hindu women in the sanskritic tradition clearly leads to male dominance and strengthen the role of the housewife as service provider role (Leslie, 1991).