CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to present and analyze the situation with regard to position of women vis-à-vis economic growth in India to explore what changes the economic growth has brought in terms of altering gender relations. The situation in terms of gender relations were assessed from three broad perspectives or dimensions that traditionally have relegated women to a lower pedestal. These three broad dimensions were Health, education and income generation. Together they constitute important for empowering women.

India adopted a liberal economic policy since early 1990s. It opened gates for foreign investment that resulted in considerable economic growth measured through country’s Gross Domestic Product. There is hardly any doubt that employment was generated resulting in young people getting jobs. This in turn also resulting in increased revenues for State thereby increasing the options for State to extend its welfare approach to spatial areas and communities that remain largely marginalized from the economic growth. Sexual and religious minorities, far off areas, tribal areas were the areas where the growth was not witnessed. These people and areas continue to live a life at below poverty level. The recent communication technologies, including mobile and satellite televisions that revolutionized the way awareness campaigns were implemented remained far from these people and areas.

It is in this context that scholars and thinkers have a general feeling that the growth in India is not evenly spread, and there are people, communities and areas where the impact of Nations economic growth is hardly reciprocated or is witnessed. While the efforts of the Government of India and also various State governments have been to cater to these people and areas, much attention was accorded to women. Since the VI five year plan, the women component has been carefully addressed and the
allocation of funds to various ministries and programmes to improve the status of women has been progressive. New programmes and schemes were implemented, especially since 1990s that directly or indirectly addressed the needs of women in an attempt to bring them as active participants in economic growth rather than mere passive recipients of doles. There were concerted efforts to improve their status to empower them by ensuring that the services are offered to them at their door steps.

Even in the last plan period adequate attention was given to women. The eleventh plan period (2007 – 2012) aimed at inclusive growth. Its vision was that every woman in the country should be able to develop to her full potential and share the benefits of economic growth and prosperity. Towards this end the approach adopted was to empower women and recognize their Agency thereby seeking to make them partners in their own development. This it sought to do by mainstreaming gender in all sectors as well as by undertaking targeted interventions.

The Plan period saw the introduction of many new schemes and programmes targeted at particular groups or aimed at addressing specific issues. These included SABLA, for empowering adolescent girls, IGMSY for supporting poor women during the final stages of their maternity, Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Yojana for women farmers, a scheme for leadership training of Minority women, Ujjawala for combating trafficking and Dhanalakshmi to tackle the issue of declining sex ratio. Existing schemes were also modified to make them more effective and to plug identified gaps. Implementation of Legislations enacted just prior to the XI Plan like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 was followed up with the States and a new legislation aimed at providing women a safe working environment, Protection Against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill was introduced in Parliament.

In terms of financial allocation too a decent share was allotted for women. In the year 2011, an amount of Indian Rupees 78251.02 crores was year marked for women development activities. The allocated funds included ministries like women
and child development and also peripheral ministries like Roads and Transport. Each Ministry and Department analyzed their allocations from a gender perspectives.

On the health front implementation of the National Rural Health Mission has resulted in an improvement in many development indicators related to women. Fertility Rates have come down and have reached replacement levels in a number of states; Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is improving, from 301 per 100,000 live births in 2003 it has come down to 212 in 20097; Infant Mortality Rate, though still high, has reduced to 50 per 1000 in 20098. Further, institutional deliveries have risen from 39 percent in 2006 to 78 percent in 2009, and availability of HIV/AIDS treatment has been enhanced.

The National Literacy Mission or Saakshar Bharat Mission, with its objective of extending educational options to those adults who have no access to formal education, targeted female literacy as a critical instrument for women’s empowerment. This has led to an increase in literacy, amongst women, from 53.67% (Census 2001) to 65.46% (Census 2011). It is also for the first time that of the total of 217.70 million literates added during the decade, women (110.07million) outnumbered men (107.63million). The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan’s focus on creation of educational infrastructure and improving quality of education in rural areas has had positive outcomes. It has led to increase in the Gender Parity Index (GPI) in primary (0.94) as well as upper primary (0.92) education. Enrolment of girls at primary level increased by 8.67 percent (86.91 percent in 2001-02 to 104.7percent in 2009-10) and at upper primary level by 13 percent (52.1 percent in 2001-02 to 65.1percent in 2004-05).

Data from the 66th round of the NSSO indicates that female work participation rate has decreased between 2004-05 to 2009-10. The share of women in usual status workers declined from 28.7% to 22.8%. In rural areas this has declined from 32.7% to 26.1% and in urban areas from 16.6% to 13.8%. On the subject of the quality of work allotted to women and consequent remuneration, the major issue is that over 90 percent of women are in informal employment where they are poorly paid, have
unsatisfactory conditions of work, do not enjoy the protection of labor laws, have no control on the terms and conditions of their employment and are subject to great insecurity of employment. This casualization of women’s work increased with the downturn in the global economy. There is evidence to show that women in the unorganized sector suffered a decline in number of work days available, poorer payment for piece work, deterioration in employment status, conversion to casual or temporary status, etc. The sharp fall in household income levels also led to an increase in unpaid domestic work for women as well as increase in domestic violence.

What is evident from above and also from the analysis of data for this research is that a lot of improvement has been brought about towards empowering women. The funds are increasingly made available to make resources accessible to women so that they can attain better education, health and livelihood options. The progress, although slow has also been a cause for altering the gender relations. Women no longer see and perceive themselves as a shadow of their male counterparts. However a lot is still desired in terms of making women empowered and to have a gender equitable society.
SUGGESTIONS

One of the major problems that is restricting proper use of the funds, thereby not helping in achieving physical targets is the current service delivery mechanisms of government. The funds in the form of schemes and programmes are routed through many ministries and departments that have their own independent systems of delivery and review of progress and monitoring. Thus women who are eligible for schemes under health, education and livelihood will have to encounter multiple windows, systems and documentation to access the schemes and programmes meant for them. While doing the field work for this research it was realized that a woman, who is often poor in rural circumstances, in order to access entitlements and resources under various government schemes and programmes have to furnish no less than 6 different types of identity documents and have to fill in at least 11 different forms. This requires frequent travel to offices, often at the cost of days wage for these poor women. This results in low interest of the beneficiary in accessing these schemes and programmes.

In the above context, it may be productive and resource worthy if there is a convergence between different ministries and departments at grass root level. The empowerment framework that has to be thought of, conceived and implemented in a convergent holistic manner. Such integrated mechanism will treat empowerment holistically and will try to address all key dimensions of empowerment simultaneously, rather than stand alone efforts. Women empowerment than has to be treated in an integrated manner.

What the government should aim and address in the XII five year plan are ways to address two important dimensions towards empowering women, namely the condition and position of women. In the figure below an attempt has been made to show the framework of empowerment in an integrated manner.
The Integrated Women Empowerment Framework (above) forms the core approach for this initiative. A strong need based approach with an eye for improved targeting and integrated planning and roll-out forms the basis of service delivery. Herein social, economic, legal and political streams of women’s empowerment are interwoven and rolled out based on need; thereby creating an overall environment for engendered development. Building of such institutional coherence among women is expected to give them the chance to enhance their self-worth and incomes at the individual level and multiply the benefits through enhanced voice, representation and acceptance at the community level. Together, the strategy aims to bring out transformational change in women’s ‘condition’ and ‘position’ across all domains of empowerment.