Conclusion

The final appreciation of the work provides an attempt to examine the concept of women’s Empowerment in the wider context of gender inequality. The objective of study is to understand various aspect of the process of women’s Empowerment. Empowerment is multidimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives.

Women’s Empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in development process of the society through the political institutions. Empowerment is as much a function of structural change as of attitudinal change of values.

The historical background of Indian society reveals that in Vedic times, a woman was given a high status ‘where women are honoured, God reside there.’ She was known as ‘Ardhangini’ one half of the husband’s body. As a mother, wife and sister she occupies an honoured place. She is the epitome of courage and boldness, love and affection and suffering.

Indian women’s involvement in politics in the modern era started in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Although British imperialism profoundly influenced by the political engagement of both elite and non-elite women. Significantly Saroj Nalini Dutta founded Mahila Samitis in 1913 in many towns and also started Women’s Institution in Bengal. In 1917 the Women’s India Association was founded in Madras by Annie Besant. The National Council of Women in India was founded in 1925 by Lady Aberdeen, Lady Tata and others. All India Women’s Conference was founded in 1927 through efforts of Margaret Cousins and others.
In 20th Century women’s movement in India was bounded with freedom movement. Women participated in large number in the freedom struggle against the British colonial rules. The entry of Annie Besant into Indian politics accelerated the process of women’s association with the freedom struggle. Sarojini Naidu was the first Indian woman to make politics her full time occupation. It was Mahatma Gandhi who gave a new direction, strength and inspiration to women in the freedom movement. Aruna Asaf Ali, Kalpana Joshi, Sucheta Kriplani, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta played a leading role in Quit India Movement in 1942.

However, with the dawn of independence and the framing of the new Constitution, the question of political rights of women entered into a new phase. In independent India, women have taken important political and administrative position. For instance, Indira Gandhi guided the destiny of the country as Prime Minister of more than 15 years. Women have also served as Prime Ministers, Governors, Chief Ministers, Ministers in Union and State Governments, Presiding Officer of Legislative Bodies and Secretaries to the Government of India. Vijayalakshmi Pundit was India’s Ambassadors to the Soviet Union and first woman President of the United Nation General Assembly, Najma Heptullah was President of Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is the fact that Indian women have held important positions both at the national and international levels.

Constitution of India guarantees equal rights to women without any discrimination. The Preamble of the Constitution stipulates ‘we the people of India do hereby adopt, enact and to give to ourselves this Constitution, and resolves to secure to all its citizen equality of status and opportunity and
liberty of thought and expression, besides social, economic and political justice. Article 14 of the Constitution provides that ‘the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of laws within the territory of India’. According to Article 15, ‘the State shall not discrimination against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them’. Article 15(3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favor of women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matter of public employment. The States is prohibited from showing any discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, caste, race, sex, descent, place of birth or residence. Article 39 of the Constitution apart from directing the State to work for the socio-economic betterment of society provides four specific directives for women:

1. Men and women equality have the right to an adequate means of live hood. [Art. 39 (a)]

2. There is equal pay for equal work for both men and women. [Art.39 (c d)]

3. The health and strength of workers men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age or strength [Art.39 (e)]

4. Make provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. (Art.42)

Various laws were passed for the protection and safeguard of women and their rights like Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955, Hindu Succession Act 1956, Hindu Guardianship Act 1956, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961,

In addition to enactment of laws by the Legislature, the Judiciary has also been interpreting some existing laws in more favorable ways of women. Judiciary’s decision cases like Muthamma, Nargis Meerja and Shah Bano and others have also been important in terms of Judicial Activism to reform the personal laws.

Empowerment of women is directly linked with education. Education enables women to choose their own way and look after their families in a better way. Education is the corner stone of women’s empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles. It is also the most influential factor in improving the child’s health and reducing infant mortality.

It is unfortunate that even after five decades of independence, the country has not been able to combat illiteracy, and women are far behind their counterpart. But the literacy rate is increasing at a slow pace. As per 2001 Census, women constitute about 54.16 percent of the total population in India. The enrollment of girls in Primary Education increased from 28.1 percent in 1950-51 to 46.8 percent in 2002-2003. On the other hand in Middle Education it was increased from 16.1 percent in 1950-51 to 43.9 percent in 2002-2003, in
Secondary Education it was increased from 13.3 percent in 1950-51 to 41.3 percent in 2002-2003 and higher education percentage increased from 10.0 percent in 1950-51 to 40.1 percent in 2002-2003.

Now, at present scenario the role of women has enormously changed. For women’s empowerment, there are multi-faced approaches that hold greater promises. Socio-economic empowerment of women is a necessary condition for enabling women to seek justice and equality. Economically women have also improved their status during the last years. While female work participation rate increased from 19.7 percent in 1981 to 25.7 percent in 2001. Still it is much lower than the male work participation rate in both urban and rural areas. Women’s share in the organized work force has also shown an increasing trend from 2.8 million (12.2%) in 1981 to 4.8 million (17.2 percent) in 1999. Similarly women’s employment in the public sector has also increased from 1.5 million (9.7 percent) in 1981 to 2.8 million (14.5 percent) in 1999. however it is still much lower than that of men.

Government of India from time to time has introduced various women specific development programmes through Five Year Plans to make women the equal partners in development with a view to enhance the status of women in various sphere of life to uplift the poor condition of women in India. Poverty reduction appears to be approach for raising the status of women in general but these strategies and other schemes for promoting literacy, social awareness, better nutrition and health, social security, etc., should be strengthened to improve status of women in India.

The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was mainly welfare oriented as far as women’s issues were concerned. The Central Social Welfare Board
(CSWB) was established in 1953, which symbolized the welfare approach to women's problems.

The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) was closely linked with overall approach to women's issues. The Second Five Year Plan efforts were geared to organize Mahila Mandal (Women's Group) at grass root levels to ensure better implementation of welfare schemes. It also suggested for speedy implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work and provision for training to enable women to complete for higher jobs.

Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) continued to lay emphasis on the welfare aspect of women. In the sphere of health, the maternal and child welfare services were to be linked up with the general health facilities and referral institutions. In the field of education, the Plan noticed that the gap between boys and girls going to school was enormous. During 1960-61, 80.5 percent of the boys were in school while only 40.4 percent of the girls were attending elementary schools. The Plan advocated the adoption of several recommendations made by the Council for Women's Education for accelerating girl's elementary education and gave special emphasis on the recruitments, training and housing of women teachers. The Plan also emphasized the need to give women special scholarship at the university level and also grants to women's colleges.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) parameters continued to stress on progressive approach, through the Social Welfare Board, of assisting voluntary organizations dealing with the welfare of women. In Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) there was a shift from welfare to development and integrated welfarist measures with development services.
In Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) Women's development was included in a separate chapter in the plan document, which adopted multi-disciplinary guideline using a three pronged thrust of health, education and employment.

The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) reviewed the achievement of the Sixth Five Year Plan for women. It stressed on greater integration between health and family welfare and the strengthening of primary health care, which largely benefited women. The Plan further commented upon the implementation of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) initiated on a pilot basis in fifty districts of the country in 1982 and stated that it should be expanded.

The Eight Five Year Plan (1992-97) was built on the solid foundations already laid during the implementation of the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans. The need for changing societies attitudes towards women through awareness generation. A proper share of nutrition and health programmes for women was emphasized.

The exercise for the Ninth Plan (1997-02) made two significant changes in the strategy of planning for women. Firstly, empowerment of women became a primary objective and secondly the Plan attempted convergence of existing services available in both women specific and women related sectors.

The Tenth Plan (2002-07) has made a major commitment towards empowering women as the agent of socio-economic change and development. This Plan was based on the recommendation of national policy for empowerment of women and suggests a three-fold strategy for empowering women through social and economic empowerment and gender justice.
In India, the Ministers of Agriculture, Rural Development, Industries, Labour, Science and Technology and the Department of Women and Child Development have taken significant initiatives by making specific schemes for enhancing women’s employment. Government’s biggest effort to give employment to women has been in the rural development sector. The most important programme in this connection was the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which was started way back in 1975. The target under this programme, however, provided coverage to 40 percent beneficiaries out of the total beneficiaries. The programme of Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) provides for 40 percent trainees to women. Under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), another important initiative of the rural development ministry, 30 percent of the employment opportunities were reserved for women. Some positive steps are taken to ensure greater accessibility of women to credit through schemes like financing of self help groups and institution like Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. The Government is also promoting local women’s self help groups in a big way under the umbrella of Indria Mahila Yojana (IMY). Indria Mahila Yojana is a programme launched by the Government of India in August 1995 as a Central Sector Project for the holistic empowerment of women. Another scheme of economic empowerment of women, i.e., Mahila Samriddhi Yojana (MSY) was introduced in 1993. Non-Governmental Organizations such as Self-Employed Women’s Association, Ahmedabad, Community Health and Development (CHD), Vellore, All India Women Conference (AIWC), New Delhi, Working Women’s Forum (WWF), Chennai and Young Women’s Christen Association (YWCA), etc., are successfully operating various programmes for economic development of women.
Women constitute half of the country’s population but their representation is not less than 10 percent representation in Parliament and State Legislatures. In First Lok Sabha (1952), there were only 22 women constituting 4.4 percent of the House. The percentage of women in the First Lok Sabha in relation to the total number of seats has been very low i.e., 4.41 percent, it increased slightly in Second Lok Sabha (1957) (5.40 percent). In Third Lok Sabha (1962) the percentage improved slightly (6.76 percent), in Fourth Lok Sabha (1967) the percentage of women representation once again fell to (5.93 percent) and in Fifth Lok Sabha (1971) there was a sharp decline when Indira Gandhi was at the peak of her career and only 22 (4.22 percent) women were elected.

The Janta Party came to power in 1977 and the percentage of women representation was further decline in the Sixth Lok Sabha (3.29 percent). There was a small increase in Seventh Lok Sabha (1980) (5.15 percent). With the advent of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984, the representation of women increased (8.9 percent). Again there was decline in the Ninth Lok Sabha (1989) (5.22 percent) when the Janta Dal formed the government. There has been a slight improvement also in Tenth Lok Sabha (1991), Eleventh Lok Sabha (1996) and Twelfth Lok Sabha (1998). In Thirteen Lok Sabha (1999), there was (9.02 percent) women member which was the highest percentage in Lok Sabha Election. However, in the Fourteen Lok Sabha (2004), again the strength of women members has come down to (8.25 percent). But the total number of women members in Lok Sabha has increased from (4.4 0 percent) in 1952 to (8.25 percent) in 2004 election.

Similarly in the case of Rajya Sabha the percentage of women members has never crossed 12 percent. In spite of the fact that representation
in Upper House is slightly better than that of Lower House, their overall percentage is not too high. In the First Rajya Sabha Election (1952) only \(7.31\%\) women were elected. The Second (1957) and Third Rajya Sabha (1962) had \(7.5\%\) and in the Fourth Rajya Sabha (1967) their percentage improved slightly to \(8.33\%\). There was sharp decline in the Fifth Rajya Sabha (1971) as only \(7\%\) women elected. There was a small increase in the Sixth Rajya Sabha (1977) \(10\%\). But it was again decline in Seventh Rajya Sabha (1980). In Tenth Rajya Sabha (1991) their representation of women increased to \(15\%\) which was the highest percentage. There was also noticeable in the Eleventh (1996), Twelfth (1998) and Thirteen (1999) elections. But in Fourteen Rajya Sabha (2004) election, percentage of women increased up to \(11.4\%\). The analysis of women’s participation in general elections over the past five decades bring out the following significant facts:

(1) The extent, nature and levels of their participation are much greater than in most of developed and developing countries.

(2) The participation of women has been steadily expanding over the years.

(3) The gap in the voter’s turnout between men and women is getting narrowed.

(4) The percentage of women getting elected to representative bodies has been increasing.

The participation of women as a voter has increased during last three decades. The participation of women in Parliamentary elections was highest in 1967 and 1977 election.
During the post-independence period, many efforts have been made to increase women's political participation in India. One such effort is 33 percent reservation for women in Local bodies through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts are a landmark in the history of women's development as it is a revolutionary step towards women's participation in decision-making and in political process of the country at least all the grass-root level and Municipalities. After these Amendments, Article 243 D and 243 T of the Constitution provide that not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by the direct election in the local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) would be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different consistencies in the local bodies. This indeed makes a beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision making process at the grassroots level. There are about one million elected women representatives in Panchayats and Municipalities bodies in India.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has made a powerful impact on women by enabling them to enter into decision making. Out of five lakhs Indian Villages, which selected more than 600 million people through this Amendment Act, 3,30,000 women enter into politics at the grass-roots level. The percentage of women in Panchayati Raj Institution has increased from 3-4 percent before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. But soon after this Amendment Act, the percentage of women has tremendously increased up to 25-40 percent. The women who have moved in large number in Panchayati Raj Institutions ushered in qualitative changes in the process of governance.
Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions are always at the forefront to raise innumerable issues related to poverty, health sanitation, education, water, alcohol and domestic violence and gender injustice.

A similar provision for one third reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and in the Legislative Assembly of the States by way of Constitutional Amendment is under the consideration of Parliament, which could not be placed in the Monsoon Session of the Parliament in 2005 due to lack of consensus among the political parties. However, these provisions are basically meant to create more consciousness among women and to strike a greater gender balance in decision making process. These Acts are expected to bring in a silent revolution in the gender constitution of political structures in India. These Amendments are a progressive landmark in the history of political empowerment. The dream of empowering women will become in reality when each and every section of society will be free from gender bias. Women should be encouraged to use their expertise to affect positive changes in the society. To empower the women, there is need to adopt an integrated approach towards upliftment and empowerment of women. It is necessary to raise the socio-economic status of women so that they may be brought into the main stream of national development.

To improve status of women, we have to reform society radically by changing the respective roles played by men and women, in the family, productive and non productive work, management of the economy and public affairs and all in the mind of people. Unless and untill a change occurs in the role and relative expectations on both sides, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an average woman to go up the professional ladder.
Suggestions:

By the way of conclusion, some suggestions have been given with regard to the women’s empowerment in India. It is expected, if these suggestions are brought into practice, naturally the fate of women will improve not only in socio-economic but also in political sphere.

1. In order to understand, analyse and solve the complexities of political processes, education is a must for women. Free universal education up to the age of 14 should be vigorously implemented.

2. There is need for reforms of laws and focus on the issues of gender inequality.

3. Women should be more active in the decision-making process. The political parties must ensure reservation of seats in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies for women. Women’s issue should be included in party manifestos.

4. The process of election should be free and fair. Electoral reforms must be expedited to free politics from money, muscle power and criminalization.

5. The government must provide supportive services such as maternity and child care facilities and also extend financial, material and other help to voluntary agencies providing such services.

6. Media, men and women’s organizations, should endeavour to create social and political awareness by eliminating social constraints/ impediments to enable women to utilize their full potential
as resources for national development in its economic, political and social-cultural aspects.

7. There should be intensive training programmes for women workers (rural and urban) on a massive scale to build up their self-confidence and enable them to rise up to leadership.

8. There should be women’s representation in all national bodies like Planning Commission.

9. The States must enact Panchayat Raj Act along with the lines of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and hold regular elections. The social worker and organizations should interact with the women member of the Panchayats and give them advice, information and training so that they can be able to perform their responsibilities properly.

10. All women member of Panchayats and other executive bodies must be trained and empowered to exercise their authority.

11. Women must be assured the availability of wider areas of job opportunities, equal wages for equal work among males and females, removal of barriers to entry or to upward mobility of female worker. The government should adopt appropriate policies in the right direction to curb the evil trends of marginalizing female workers.

12. Women need to be empowered at the earliest times. Employment has to be in terms of equal access of production, information and technology, social and family resources and legal rights to property besides social, economic and political empowerment. Because social
justice demands that women must play an important role in the
development of a nation or the society. As the women constitute nearly
half of the population, therefore, active participation of women in the
socio-economic and political fields is necessary for laying down the
foundation of a strong nation.