Chapter - IV

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

4.0 Introduction

The strength of chain is the strength of its weakest link. In a society, women are the weakest links, so that they may be strengthened for strengthening the society as a whole and that is possible only by empowering them. Nehru said, "Women should be uplifted for the upliftment of the nation, if a woman is uplifted, society and nation is uplifted."¹ Women empowerment is critical to the process of development of the community. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the mainstream of economic development. According to Swami Vivekanand, "…… there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing² (Yojana, Aug. 2001). Women have to play an important role in the building up of every economy. Women who form almost one half of the world's population constitute the visible majority of the poor. Women either solely or largely support an increasing number of families. Women experience poverty more than man. When money is given to men, it may not benefit the family but when women manage money, it is found to be better utilized. Projects aiming to improve the living conditions of the poor cannot, therefore be effective unless women participate in their formulation and implementation as contributors as well as beneficiaries. "Increasing women's capabilities and empowering them is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development."³

In India, apart from the provision in the constitution and the ratification of different international convections, several legislative acts have also been passed to
ensure women empowerment. Moreover, women empowerment has received attention of the government right from the beginning of Indian planning.

Bringing women into the mainstream of development has thus been major concern of the government since independence. In order to empower and bring them into the mainstream, an enabling environment with requisite policies and programmes, institutional mechanisms at various levels and adequate financial resources has all along been tried to be created. The Ministry of Rural Area and Employment has special components for women in all its programmes and certain amount of funds is earmarked as women's component to ensure a flow of adequate resource for women.4

4.1 The Concept of Empowerment

In simple words, empowerment is giving power. Power is the keyword of the term empowerment. According to the International Encyclopedia (1999), power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life toward desired social, political and economic goals or status. Power means control over material assets, intellectual resource and ideology. In Webster's English Dictionary, the verb empower means to give the means, ability and authority. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives and in their society, by acting on issues that they consider as important. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community and challenges our assumptions about the status-quo, asymmetrical power relationships and social dynamics.5

Empowerment implies a state of mind and attitude of a person. It is a process through which people or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decision that affect their day-to-day life. Awareness is a necessary part
of empowerment. Awareness of rights is required for a person to develop his capacity of self-control, self-strength and self-reliance and to build freedom of choice and action. Empowerment is about change, choice and power. It is a process of change by which the individual and groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives.

The World Bank defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is action which both build individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organization and institutional context which govern the use of these assets."\(^6\)

Economist Bina Agarwal defines empowerment as a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged and powerless individuals or groups to challenge and change in their favour, existing power relationship that places them in subordinate economic, social and political position. Empowerment can manifest itself in acts of individual resistance as well as in group mobilization. Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres-economic, political, social/cultural, personal and familiar to change the ones life\(^7\)

Thus empowerment is multi-dimensional gaining self-confidence and meaningful participation in decision making. As the foremost precursor to development and empowerment of women comprehensively seeks to ensure an equitable division of resources and carve a clear role for them in decision making. It helps them articulate their as well as other rights and participate actively in democratic processes. Empowerment also wards off retrogressive practices like female infanticide and gender based violence.
Empowerment means to make one powerful or to equip one with the power to face challenges of life, to overcome the difficulties, handicaps and inequalities. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process, which would enable women to realize their full identity and powers - in all spheres of life. It would consisting in providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the circumstances that influences their lives and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

Empowerment does not means setting women against men. Indeed, it means making both men and women realize their changing roles and status and develop a consensus for harmonious living in the context of an egalitarian society. It means redistribution of work roles, redistributing their values to the changing world and attitudes and evolving new kinds of adjustments, understanding and trust with each other. Empowerment of women is a new ideology for carrying democratic values into the family and society.

Empowerment of women means equal status to women. Here the balance of power between men and women is equal and neither party has dominance over the other. Empowering women socio-economically through increased awareness of their rights and duties as well as access to resources is a decisive step towards greater security for them. Empowerment includes higher literacy level and education for them, better healthcare for women and children, equal ownership of productive resources, increase participation in economic and commercial sections, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus the framework of empowerment encompasses the welfare of women, satisfaction of
basic needs, access to resources, conscientisation to attain gender equality participation in
decision making alongside men and control, which refers to the ultimate level of equality
and empowerment. In short, the philosophy of women's empowerment needs a total
overhauling of Indian society.  

4.2 Reason for Empowerment

Kamela Basin (1992) asks a question - Why women need to be empowered. According to her sustainable development has to be women centered.

Empowerment of women means many things to Basin like --

(1) it means recognizing women contribution and development knowledge.

(2) it means helping women fight against their own fears, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

(3) it means enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity

(4) it means women controlling their own bodies

(5) it means women becoming economically independent and self-reliant

(6) it means women controlling resources like land prosperity

(7) it means reducing women's burden of work especially within the house

(8) it means creating and strengthening women's group and organizations

(9) it means promoting equalities of nurturing, varying gentleness etc.

4.3 Purpose of Empowerment

According to R. India and Deepak Kumar Behra (1999) women must be considered as the agent of development rather than targets of development agencies and
lanners. Women must define their own needs and goals as well as strategies. A prerequisite for women's participation in development process is their empowerment.

The international conference of population and development held in Cairo (1994) established a new consensus on two fundamental points:

1] Empowerment of women and improving their status are essential to realize the full potential of economic, political and social development.

2] Empowerment of women is an important end itself.

According to India Kurukshetra\textsuperscript{11} (1999) the conference declared that empowerment of women through education was stressed upon for elimination of violence and atrocities against women in home, at home place and public and private institutions. This discrimination results in their further marginalization as members of the society. Women must exercise full participation in decision making process in all walks of life and fully participate with men in finding equitable and practical solutions to issues both in the family and society. It also declared that human rights of women and girls child are inalienable, integral and invisible parts of universal human rights.

In her measure to mark the first day of the 'Year of Empowerment of Women', the National Commission for Women Chairperson Vibha Parthasarathi said, "the year to come must see women in apex decision making bodies, enter profession denied to them so far, recognize their contribution on important and legitimate and help them to fight against disease and deprivation, indignity and inequality."

4.4 Characteristics of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment processes certain characteristics, they are the following :-
1. Women empowerment is giving power to women; it is making women better off.

2. Women empowerment enables a greater degree of self-confidence and sense of independence among women.

3. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.

4. Women empowerment gives the capacity or power to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society.

5. Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves to increase their self-reliance.

6. Women empowerment provides greater economy to women.

7. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.

8. Women empowerment challenges traditional power equations and relations.

9. Women empowerment abolishes all gender based discrimination in all institutions and structure of society.

10. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.

11. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive power of existing gender and social relations.

12. Empowerment of women makes them more powerful to face the challenges of life, to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities.
13. Empowerment of women enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life.

14. Empowerment also means equal status to women.

15. Empowerment also means providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom belief and practice.

16. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familiar and economic spheres and various levels such as individual, group and community.

17. Empowerment of women is an on going dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate.

18. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

4.5 Need and Importance of Women Empowerment

Gender quality and empowerment of women is recognized globally as a key element to achieve progress in all area. The charter of United Nations signed in 1943 is the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality as a fundamental right. Ever since there had been many convections, programmes and goals to help women conferring on them human rights which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. In order to promote development of women and to protect their rights, the General Assembly of U.N. adopted, "Convection on the elimination of all forms of
discrimination against women" on 18th December 1979, which came into force on 3rd September 1981.

The convection also took notice of particular problems faced by rural women and their significant role in survival of their families. So all states to the convection agreed to take appropriate measures to enable rural women to participate and benefit from rural development. In spite of many convections and time bound measurable goals, world statistics speak of deplorable state of women that is a cause of concern.¹²

In term of every indices of development and socio-economic, women have faced worse than men, in all regions and in all strata of the population. Hence the need and importance of women empowerment can be looked up on in the following direction:-

(a) **As women :-**

Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor population or almost 900 million of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate population of 876 million people are women. They produce 50 percent of the food worldwide but receive only 10 percent of the incomes.

(b) **Earnings :-**

Women's average earnings are consistently lower than those of men but in the unorganized sector, which account for 94 percent of economically active women, earning are even lower.

(c) **Health :-**

In terms of food intake, women suffer greater deprivation intra familially (women eat last as part of the culture of self-effacement and services to other and if there is insufficient food the men and children get fed first and the women do without). A very
systematic sex bias is also reflected in higher nutritional or caloric deficiency among girls via-avia boys.

(d) Education :-

Of the 960 million illiterate persons in the world, 640 millions or \( \frac{2}{3} \)rd are women. In 2001, the literacy rate of women has increased to 54.16 still it is lower than male literacy rate. School enrolment figures for girls have been - and continue to be lower than for boys at all stages and ages, and the drop out rates also higher for girls at every stages from primary to high school.\(^{13}\)

(e) Politics :-

Political space has always been monopolized by men. Representation of women among member of parliament and state legislations has never exceeded 7 percent and has remained around 5 percent over the years despite the increasing visibility of women. Women's representation at the higher rungs of the decision-making position has also been consistently low.\(^{14}\)

(f) Socio-cultural Factors :-

The cultural construct of son preference adds to the psychological diffidence of the female child, dowry deaths, violence against women has its roots in the subordination of women at the social level and their vulnerability has not decreased but increased in developing economics as a consequence of social disruptions backlash and a general degeneration values etc.\(^{15}\)

4.6 Steps in Women Empowerment

There are various steps in achieving women empowerment.
1. The first step begins at a personal level. An individual woman develops feelings of personal power, command and self-sufficiency over material and inherent choices she has to make.

2. In the second step, empowerment takes place on an interpersonal level. Here a woman influences the decision making power of another woman through their contact and working together.

3. In the third step, they emphasize the goals for social action and social change. A community development programmes develops through a group effort. But there can be possibility of backward linkages also. A community development programmes can lead to individual empowerment and interpersonal empowerment.

4.7 Ways and Means of Achieving Women Empowerment

Empowerment of women can be achieved through education, women's organization, information technology, science and technology, entrepreneurship, microfinance institutions, law and agriculture.

(a) Education :-

Education plays the most crucial role in empowering women. It is not only generates momentum but also sustain empowerment process in the long run. Empowerment consists of five dimensions, each equally important but none sufficient by itself to enable women to act on their own behalf. Educational settings have the potential to foster all the five dimensions but require the educational programmes to be designed explicitly to achieve each of those ends. It is relevant to point out that one of the
important recommendations of the National Policy on education is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education.

To achieve empowerment through education, several concepts must be introduced at appropriate levels. When referring to primary and secondary schooling, empowerment should enable girls to develop the knowledge and skill to nullify and counter. Sexual stereotypes and conceptions of masculinity and feminity that limits the social potential of women. Empowering girls should mean offering them courses with content that not only attack current sexual stereotypes but also provide students with alternative visions of a gender free society.

Gender and women studies programmes have made it possible for student to gain a greater understanding of how gender forces operate in society. These programmes influenced the development and discrimination of new theoretical and methodological approaches dealing with the nature of gender, national development and social change.

Distance education is another way of empowering adult woman. The question that how can woman representatives who are pre-occupied with their political and administrative enagments or woman employees who are busy with their jobs and activities can pursue education in view of paucity of time arises. Distance education is the intermediate and most satisfactory answer

(b) Entrepreneurship :-

Women's entrepreneurship is both about women's position in society and about the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs faced many obstacles specifically in market their product (including family responsibilities) that have
to be overcome in order to give them access to the same opportunities as men. In addition, in some countries, women may experience obstacles with respect to holding property and entering contracts. Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in microenterprises will be encouraged and aggravated. Rural women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. Now what is the need is knowledge regarding accessibility to loans, various funding agencies, procedure regarding certificate, awareness on government welfare programmes, motivation, technical skill and support from family, government and other organization. Moreover formation and strengthening of rural women entrepreneurs network must be encouraged. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This network helps to give lectures, printed material imparting first hand technical knowledge in production, processing, procurement, management and marketing among the other women. This will motivate other rural women to engage in micro-entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides, adding to the family income and national productivity. Thus women are empowered through entrepreneurship. Micro entrepreneurship are strengthening the women empowerment and remove the gender inequality.\textsuperscript{18}

(c) \textbf{Science and Technology :-}

Science and technology can be effectively used to ease women's work load inside and outside the house involving them as equal partners, recognizing their
knowledge, experiences and the significant role they can play in sustainable development with organized orientation and training, there is a great potential for empowering women with appropriate and sustainable technologies. Research findings have shown that with the aid of appropriate developmental programmes women as mother can become effective agents of change in eradicating poverty in current generation and preventing the transmission to the next generation.\(^{19}\)

(d) **Women's Organization** :-

Women's organization have come to be recognized as the main source of power, position and strength for women in modern India. A women fight injustices perpetrated by men single handed or also. But, she can do the same collectively through organizations. Women SHGs in rural area, under Stree Shakti Scheme, are doing yeomen service in organizing women power. Women from different sections are being brought together and organized into an association to wage a war on liquor shops and gambling dens, mataka centres etc. and fight for abolishing age old practices like wife beating, polygamy, dowry-connected harassment, devadasi system, child marriages, etc. Besides, the SHG are providing employment opportunities to large masses of illiterate, ignorant and suppressed women folk. A proper leadership among women will go to a long way in empowering them.\(^{20}\)

(e) **Information Technology** :-

The single most resource that liberates people from poverty and empower them is knowledge. A society by using knowledge through all its constitutions, endeavours to empower and enrich its people and thus will become a knowledge society. Such knowledge society will need empowerment at all levels and among all the key actions of the society. At this juncture, it is essential to see the possibilities of women's
empowerment through information technology. Access to information is the key for economic, social and political empowerment of women. So far no other technology claimed to have given the instant, uncensored, practically feasible, economically viable information to the women folk than the information technology. IT poses new forms of learning, education, health services, livelihood options, goverence mechanism and e-commerce options which would lead to the ultimate goal that is woman's empowerment.  

(f) Microfinance Institution :-

Microfinance institutions play a dominant role in the empowerment of women. There are basically two schools of thought on the empowerment potential of microfinance programmes, with one school emphasizing the negative aspects, arguing that men in the households tend to appropriate the loans and benefits from the loans. This school see the household as a site of conduct, where women and men struggling for control over resources. The other school emphasizes the positive aspects, given the evidence that households with loans generally have higher income and level of consumption regardless of the gender dynamics within the household. This school emphasizes a more consensual conception of the households, with benefits for the entire family also considered as benefits to women.

Different research and case studies on the impact of microfinance for women's empowerment have been carried out, though the majority of these studies have been undertaken in South Asia given the longer presence of microfinance institutions there. Many of these research studies show that microfinance institutions help a lot in empowerment of women.  

(g) Law :-
Empowerment of women is an input which is intended to eliminate their subordination and establish equality. Empowerment is a positive concept. It requires affirmative state action in support of those who are to be empowered. The law can create such empowerment by way of conferring rights directly to the person whom it intend to empower by imposing liability on other persons forwards the persons to be empowered.

For the empowerment of women in India, certain existing laws have been amended and modified according to need of time by creating penal sanction against certain type of behaviour, which infringe, deprive or derogate the dignity of women.

The Indian constitution has the following provisions for making women at par with men :-

(i) Article 14 of the constitution guarantees to all equal protections of laws and equal before law. Both these expressions have also been used in "universal declaration of human rights". The equality before law is guaranteed to all without regard to sex, race, colour or nationality.

(ii) Article 15(3), empowers the state to make special provision for women. Women require special treatment due to their very nature. "Women's physical structure and performance and maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence and her physical well being becomes an objective."

(iii) Article 16(2) lays down the rule that no citizen can be discriminated for any employment under the state on ground of religion, race, caste or sex.

(iv) Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243D provides that in every panchayat, seats shall be reserved for SC, ST and not less than one third shall be reserved at village level shall be reserved in such manner as the legislature of the state may be law provide.
Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, 1992, Article 243T provides that one-third seats in Municipal Corporations shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the municipality.

**Agriculture :-**

The National Agricultural Policy of India (2000) and the Indian National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) have highlighted the need for incorporating gender issues in the agricultural development agenda to provide recognition of women's role as farmers and producers of crops and livestock, users of technology, active agents in marketing and processing and storage of food and agricultural labourers.

Various central sector schemes are in operation in different states on women in agriculture. The Central Government had launched a scheme under the eight five year plan to make women farmers self-reliant by providing them opportunities to avail themselves of the benefits and opportunities of the existing agriculture system. The project was implemented on a pilot basis with one district each from Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kerla, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In Kerala, the project was implemented in Palakkad since 1994.

The State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) Kerala, through Kudumbashree has increasing recognized the programme on "Women in Agriculture", as a powerful tool for empowerment of women. Lease land farming, skill development, agriculture business, agri-processing etc. are their thrust area. The micro-enterprises strategy engage in agriculture related enterprises, such as vegetable farming, crop nurseries, gardening units, mushroom cultivation, vermin compost production, bee
keeping, dairy hatchery units, backyard poultry, agro-processing, produce marketing etc.  

4.8 Indicators of Empowerment

There are several indicators of empowerment. At the individual level, participation in crucial decision making process, ability to prevent violence, self-confidence and self-esteem, improved health and nutrition conditions, etc. are the major indicators. At the community levels, the important indicators are existence of women's organizations, increased number of women leaders, involvement of women in designing development tools and application of appropriate technology etc. At the national level, the indicators are awareness of her social and political rights, adequate representation in legislative bodies, integration of women in particular in national development plans etc.

Improvement in economic status gets reflected in improved social, political and cultural status of women. Self-confidence and self-esteem of women proceed simultaneously with their empowerment. In brief, all indicators can be classified into two broad categories namely visible and invisible indicators. Amongst visible indicators, mention could be made of women's representation in parliaments. Thirty percent representation is a visible indicators of women empowerment. The share of women representatives in the national parliaments of a few developed and developing countries is shown in Table 1.
Table No. 4.1 : Seats in parliaments held by women (as percentage of total)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing countries</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Developed countries</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It can be seen from the Table-2 that both in developed and developing countries women hold less seats than the men. However, in developed countries their representation is relatively higher than in developing countries. In this context, it can be said that increasing the number of women in parliament and also raising women's visibility in position of authority and decision are quite necessary for their empowerment politically as well as economically.

The Beijing World Conference on Women (1995) proposed the following qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating women's empowerment.

The qualitative indicators of empowerment :-

1. Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence.
2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy, etc. depending on the programmes.

3. Increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for children.

4. Increase or decrease in workloads of women as a result of new programmes.

5. Changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and on the community.

6. Visible increase or decrease in levels of democratic violence and other forms of violence, perpetrated on women and girl child.

7. Response to and changes in social and other customs that are anti-women. For example: child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows etc.

8. Visible changes in women's participation levels for instance: Are more women attending public meetings and participating in training programmes?, Are women demanding participation in other events related to their lives?

9. Increase in bargaining/negotiating power of the women as an individual in the home and community as well as in collectives of women.

10. Increased access to and ability to get information and knowledge not only about the project but also about what affects their lives.

11. Formation of cohesive and articulate women's groups/collective at the village level, district, block and state levels.

12. Positive changes in social altitudes amongst the community members towards discrimination against women and child girl.

13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household.
14. Women's decision making over the kind of work she is doing. Is her income in expenditure in her control or is she still subservient to make members in the family?

The qualitative indicators of empowerment:

1. Demographic trends in maternal/morality rate, fertility rates, sex rates, life expectancy at birth, average age of marriage etc.
2. Numbers of women participating in different development programmes.
3. Greater access and control over community resource/government schemes/services, for example crèches, credit saving groups, co-operatives, schools, wells etc.
4. Visible changes in physical health/status, nutrition levels.
5. Changes in male/female literacy level - primary, secondary and adult literacy including enrolment and retention rates.
6. Participation rates of women in political processes at the local level.\(^2^4\)

4.9 Empowerment of Women through SHGs

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

The human development index as calculated by the UNDP is based on three major components: life expectancy at birth, literacy, and per capita purchasing power. Among the 174 countries ranked, India gets the 128th rank. Gender Development Index is also available for 143 countries in which India ranks 108.

Indian scenario presents a dismal picture on several key indicators contributing to human development. The first alarming signal is the sex ratio adverse to women. As per the 2011 census of District, the sex ratio is 947 and it is further disappointing that 0-6 yrs group, the sex ratio is only 927.

The poor health of women coupled with low literacy profiles adversely affect their work participation rate and the resulting standard of living. Hence our Human Development Index contributes to be at the power running of the ladder.

Women are the bearers of the next generation, the caregivers in the family. But they suffer every deprivation. They are the beasts of burden, attending to all domestic chores, fetching fuel, fodder and water; generally from long distances, working from dawn to dusk and no recognition in the system of national accounts. Even why they do bring in some income, they spend it all on the family and struggle to battle in poverty. Often they also finance the husband's 'leisure activities' like alcohol, only to be beaten when he is drunk.

Despite all our plans, female adult literacy in the country has just touched 54 percent in 2001. This leaves 46 percent of our women illiterate and unaware of their rights. It is true that education open up new vistas to women but education alone does not solve problems. For the mass of our women it cannot be education of traditional kind.
What they need, is training in vocation skills, coupled with a basic knowledge related to their local situations. Special incentives to encourage the education of girls in regular schools particularly in out rural areas and urban slums are an urgent necessity.

India, like any other developing countries has a large unorganized sector where the majority of the women workers are found. This sector has been largely neglected in so far as provision of support services and social security benefits are concerned. Even the basic laws, like the Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Maternity Benefit Act, etc. have not benefited them. The enforcement machinery of the labour departments, has totally failed to give this sector the support and the protection, that it deserves.

The central and state governments have over the years initiated several programmes to change the mindset of rural women with incentives to enable them women to live in dignity. Religious heads and law courts have also responded to this critical need to change altitudes in families and bring about a shift from the 'son preference' syndrome. More action would be necessary in this direction, with media campaigns to remove gender bias.

Participation in the freedom struggle brought political awakening to our women. Reservations in the local bodies have ensured women's entry into the political process at the grass root levels. There is now 33% reservation in a Assemblies and Parliaments and government is doing to pass the women reservation bills of 50% in near future, in order to empower women and bring them into leadership positions. But empowerment is important than political participation. Women have to be equipped to help themselves, they have to be made aware to their rights and enable to discover their own potential.\textsuperscript{26}
Empowerment of women is a crucial factor in the eradication of poverty, as the women are the key contributors to the economy and in combating poverty through both remunerative and non-remunerative work at home, in the community and in the work place.

4.9.1 Nutrition and Health Empowerment :-

Nutrition well being is a sustainable force for health and development and for maximization of human genetic potential. In fact, the measurement of national development is by nutrition and health indicators like neo-natal morality rate, infant mortality rate, mortality under 5 year, maternal mortality rate, crude death rate and life expectancy at birth. The nutritional status of the community has, therefore been recognized as an important indicator of national development. In other words, malnutrition is an impediment in national development and hence assumes the status of national problem and not merely a sectoral problem.27

Nutrition, health checkup, blood donation, immunization (pulse polio) camp has been conducting by self help groups.

Promotion of village level women's organization is now being recognized as an important step towards the improvement of women's nutrition and health status. Self help groups do have a significant role to play in the lives of women.

4.9.2 Economic Perspective of Empowerment of Women :-

Women's participation in income generating activities is believed to increase their status and decision making power, with employment.

The economic contribution is related to their status and role in the family and in the society. If a woman is not economically self-dependent, she can never claim an
equal status with man. The problem of poverty cannot be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to women. Even where there is a male earner, women's earnings form a major part of the income of poor households. Moreover, women contribute a large share of what they earn to basic family maintenance than men; increases in women's income translates more directly into better child health, nutrition and family well being.

Women's participation in the labour force also brings about changes in awareness and altitudes, which may be have long term benefits such as to health and education programmes, reduction in birth-rate, thrift and savings etc. Economic independence of women will create far reaching social changes and prove as necessary weapon for them to face injustice and discrimination.

The goal of poverty reduction and empowerment of women can be effectively achieved if poor women could organize into groups for community participation as well as for use of their rights in various services related to their economic and social well being.28

4.9.3 Social Empowerment of Women :-

Gandhiji said that women are the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minute detail of the activities of life and she has a right of freedom and liberty with man. But today in India with special reference to the villages, we see that by sheer force of a viscous systems even the most ignorant and worthless man have been enjoying a superiority over women which do not deserve and ought not to have. We can however, see that the trends have changed to a great extent with more and more women coming out and competing with men in many spheres. We can see today women and all spheres of life with no exception.
Constitutionally and legal, man and women are equal. In real practice, however, women still finds a secondary place. Example of inequalities galore in respect of women-men birth rate, education and participation in matters of financial and political. Atrocities are perpetrated on women. She is viewed not as a human being bit a delectable thing.

Efforts are being made to change this situation and bring about a stage where man and women be viewed equally. Many schemes are being implemented for equal education and equal opportunities of employment so that, women would have equal rights. Consequently, there is seen some progress in this regard. As the women has now increased presence in banks, gram panchayats, various government sectors etc. her social status is seen somewhat increased. However, this process is slow to get a boost to this process, mindset of the society as a whole should change.

The social empowerment means that the women should get an important place in her family and society and should have a right to enable her to make use of available resources. The member of SHGs are mostly women. They save money and invest in SHG. They can use it at the time of their needs. As they can have in their hand, they get some status in her family. It has resulted in developing self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect.

4.9.4 Political Empowerment :-

The political element entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize the surrounding situation for social transformation, leadership qualities are also developed in women, because they more participate in the social activities like trying to solve the problem of their society or village.
In 1991, constitutional provision for 33% reserved seat in Gram panchayat in our country came into being. In the beginning, the process of participation of women slow, but now the situation is fast changing. Due to advent of SHG, women were able to see the outside the world. They understood the processes involved in solving the local problems through political participation. By and by, their participation in political process started increasing. In SHGs, they found an opportunity to become a leader of SHGs. In some places, local SHGs acted as pressure groups for or against a particular political candidate in Panchayat elections. The SHGs plays an important role to hone the leadership skill in women in the rural region.

Thus self help group has proved that an important means in taking in process of women empowerment to rural region. Thus the SHG programme has been successful in strengthening collective self help capacities of the poor at the local level, meeting their peculiar needs leading to their empowerment. The rural poor, with the intermediation of voluntary organization also join together for self help to secure better economic growth. This has resulted in the formation of large number of SHGs in the country, and the SHGs have mobilized savings and recycled the resources generated among the members.29

4.10 Rural Scenario

The rural scenario is still one where the women folk in general remain at the periphery. With heavy responsibilities of tending their families and the farms. It is doubtful if they would have the time, despite the inclination, to attend meetings of the Gram Sabha where all adult women are members. What is more, certain factors like caste, feudalism, apathy and family status do come in the way. Though we have given an
equal status to women and rightly so, it is yet to be seen if, they are really motivated to contribute their mite in such meetings.

4.11 Development Policies for Women

Since the 1950s, when development planning first came on the international spotlight, a number of approaches, having different effects on women, have been tried. They are as follows:

1] **Welfare**: This was the earliest approach. It dominated from 1950 to 1970 and is still widely used. Its main purpose was to enable women to be better mothers influencing their role in the society.

2] **Equity**: This was the original approach of women in development and was utilized during the decade for women 1975-85. Women were seen as active participants in the development process.

3] **Anti-Poverty**: It aimed at increasing the productivity of poor women and saw their poverty as a problem of underdevelopment, not of subordination.

4] **Efficiency**: This is the most prevalent approach used today. Its aim is to ensure that development is efficient and effective.

5] **Empowerment**: An approach articulated by third World feminists since the mid-1980s. It aims at empowering women through greater self-reliance and sees women's oppression as stemming not only from male patriarchal attitudes but also from colonial and neo-colonial oppression.

4.11.1 Legislative Support for Women :-
The Government has given greater focus to issues relating to women through creation of an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development, initiation of legislation that has taken the country closer to complete legal equality for women, gender budgeting and initiation of programs for greater inclusion of women in all walks of life.


4.11.2 Women's Reservation :-

1] **The new Act 2006** initiated by the Government has provided for reservation for women for the first time and wards have been reserved accordingly in the elections to cantonment boards.

2] **Women's Reservation Bill 2010**: Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill proposes to provide 'thirty three per cent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India and State legislative assemblies reserved for women. The Women's Reservation Bill has been a political raw nerve for nearly a decade now. Due to female feticides, infanticide and issues related to women's health, sex ratio in India is alarming at 1.06 males per female. It is expected this bill will change the society to give equal status to women.
Financial Focus:

1] The Government has introduced gender budgeting for improving the sensitivity of programs and schemes to women's welfare. The budgetary outlay for 100 per cent women specific programs has been rising every year and this year it is Rs. 11,460 crore.

2] Ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the beneficiaries of all Government schemes are women and girl children has been laid down as a key target in the 11th plan.

4.11.3 Girl's Education :-

2,180 residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya schools have been sanctioned and are providing elementary education to 1,82,000 out of school girls. Gaun Ki Beti, Kisori Balika Divas Yojana, Ladii Laksmi Yojana, Cycle Praday Yojana, are the programs run by the Government for empowering the girls in India.

4.11.4 Gender Inequality :-

The principle of gender equality and protection of women's right has been receiving attention from the days of independence. Accordingly, the concern of the country in safeguarding the rights and the privilege of women found its best expression in the constitution of India. While article 14 confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social activities without any discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, caste etc. Article 15 (3) empowers the State to make affirmative discrimination in favor of women. Similarly Article 16 provides an equality of opportunities in the matter of public appointments for all citizens, yet, another Article 39 mentions that the State shall direct its policy towards providing men and women equally, the right to means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work. Article 42 directs
the State to make provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 51 (A) (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women. To make this de jure equality into a de facto one, special legislations have been enacted from time to time in support of women.

On 8 March 1996, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the parliament passed resolution to set up a Standing Committee for the "Improvement of the Status of Women" in India and the Committee on Empowerment of Women was constituted in April 1997. National Commission for Women [NCW] a statuary body set up in 1992, safeguards the rights and interests of women. It continues to pursue its mandated role and activities viz.; safeguarding women's rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities, sexual harassment of women at work place, conducting Parivarik/Mahila Lok Adalats, legal awareness programs/camps, review of both women specific and women related legislations, investigates into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc.30

4.12 Milestones and Challenges

[1] Convergence of service delivery at village levels:

There are two main programs in the Department of Women and Child Development, which aim at convergence of services delivery at the village level, namely. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Integrated Women's Empowerment Program (IWEP). The ICDS network through Anganwadi Centres reaches 85 per cent of the villages and hamlets in the country. The IWEP (erstwhile Indira Mahila Yojana) which extends to 650 Blocks operates through the self-Help-Groups of women. Both
these programs can be effective vehicles for the implementation of the National Population Policy. It is, therefore, critical that both the schemes are universalized.


The formation of Self-Help-Groups as a basis for the social and economic empowerment of deprived and disadvantaged women has been found to be a successful mechanism for the organization, mobilization and self development of women. This has been tested through the IWEP and Sawa Shakti projects of the Department of Women and Child Development and is being replicated in a number of programs of other Departments. These groups can facilitate the process of economic empowerment through thrift and savings, training and skill up gradation and access to credit and other productive resources. They can also be instruments of social empowerment through awareness generation and convergence of delivery of schemes. With the feeling of ownership and management of their own resources and savings, poor women have been able to choose their priorities and have even been found to cover the cost of additional nutrition and health gaps. The success of this approach has resulted in universalization of this mode of organization in all the southern States. There is a need to replicate this mode throughout the country.

[3] Access to Resources:

The issue of improved health and nutrition is intimately linked to access to and control over local, social, and economic structures. For women to be empowered we need to ensure: [a] equitable access and distribution of resources like land, credit etc. [b] access to education. [c] access to health /nutrition [d] access to water and sanitation. This implies that resources should flow into these areas to bridge the gender gap and that
systems be developed to plan, implement and monitor the 'bridging' of the gap. Ownership of land tends to reduce fertility by providing an alternate means of security. Similarly education has its own impact on reproductive behavior of both men and women. Improving the access of women/households in rural areas and urban slums to safe sources of drinking water will free them from the drudgery of fetching water and in decreasing the morbidity resulting from water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera. This will impact positively on the health and energy levels of women. [e] access to technologies which can reduce the drudgery of women on the various works performed by them both within and outside the household is also a very useful intervention for empowering the women.

[4] Women Component Plan:

While the Planning Commission has already incorporated the concept of Women's Component Plan in Five Year Plans whereby 30 per cent of funds actually flow to women, it is important that guidelines are revisited to ensure their effectiveness.

[5] Development of Gender Disaggregated Data System:

One of the constraints in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of plans for the development of women is the absence of gender segregated data on various indices of development at the State, district and sub district levels. These lacunae in our statistical system should be addressed on a priority basis.

[6] Freedom from Violence :

Women and girls face violence in various forms at various stages of their life cycle. This takes the form of female foeticide and infanticide, rape, dowry death and
more indirect forms such as desertion or abandonment of older women. This calls for a multipronged strategy of implementation of laws, awareness, community sanctions etc.

[7] Sustained Media Campaign:

One of the most effective interventions that can take place to address the issues of attitude and mind sets of men and women of the community and also of the functionaries of the government - the bureaucracy, police and judiciary is media campaigns. A sustained campaign through the print, electronic and folk media is necessary on various issues related to empowerment of women, health and nutrition, laws, value of the girl child, violence against women etc.

Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and self help groups can be very effective in the process of empowerment through participatory communication. Participatory communication can help women to change their attitudes, behaviors and styles of communication. Empowerment is a complex term and may be measured in terms of Women's freedom to shape their lives, their control over resources, their access to basic facilities, their level of political participation, their ability to take their own decisions and their ability to remove hindrances in their path to progress. Self-help groups of women have been found to be very effective grassroots institutions in facilitating access for women to means of development be it information, financial and material resources or services. The 'self-help group' mode should be encouraged, so that the groups become dynamic change agents in bringing about empowerment and socio-economic development of women. Organizing women into self-help groups marks the beginning of a major process of empowering women by strengthening their capacity for collective decision making and entrepreneurship development. Gender sensitization
training has been developed to initiate the task of attitude change within male-dominated extension and research bureaucracies and donor agencies.31

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