CHAPTER – IV

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

The importance of women as a important human resource was recognized by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in their favour. A number of Articles of the Constitution specially reiterated the commitment of the constitution towards the socio economic development of women and uploading their political right and participation in decision making.

Drawing the strength from the constitutional commitments, the Government of India has been engaged in the continuous endeavour of concretely translating all the rights, commitments and safe guards incorporated in the Indian Constitution for women from de jure to de facto status.¹

The State enacted several women-specific and women-related legislations to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of Sati etc., The recently notified Prevention of Domestic Violence Act is a landmark law in acting as a deterrent as well as providing legal recourse to the women who are victims of any form of domestic violence. Apart from these, there are a number of laws which may not be gender specific but still have ramifications on women.

NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 has as its goal bringing about advancement, development and empowerment of women in all
spheres of life through creation of a more responsive judicial and legal system sensitive to women and mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. The strengthening and formation of relevant institutional mechanisms and implementation of international obligations/commitments and co-operation at the international, regional and sub-regional level was another commitment. The present Government in their National Common Minimum Programme have laid down six basic principles of governance one of which is to empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. India has ratified the convention with two declaratory statements and one reservation. Both the declarations relate to marriage. The provisions on marriage and family relations in its Article 161(1) would be ensured in conformity with our policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any community without its initiative and consent and that while agreeing to the principle of compulsory registration of marriages, failure to get the marriage registered at the same time will not invalidate the marriage.

The Mexico Plan of Action, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, the Beijing Declaration as well as the Plat form for Action and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st Century, titled “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action”
have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up. The Beijing Platform for Action lays down critical areas of concern for the women, which are listed in the box. The commitments made in the international conventions are as far as possible reflected in the Plan documents and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women.\(^2\)

Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been established in the Millennium Declaration at the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000. These include promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and improving maternal health. Though only these two are explicitly gender specific, gender equality is at the core of achievement of MDGs— from improving health and fighting disease, to reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, to expanding education and lowering child mortality, to increasing access to safe water, and to ensuring environmental sustainability.

**National Plans and Planning Process**

The planning process has developed over the years from purely “welfare” oriented approach where women were regarded as objects of charity to the development programmers and currently to their “empowerment”. It was only from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards that women secured a special niche and space in the national plans and planning process primarily with thrusts on health, education and employment of women. A paradigm shift occurred in the Eighth Plan where ‘empowerment’ of women was recognized and accepted as a distinct strategy.

A further impetus for sartorial contribution to women’s programmers was received with the introduction of the concept of Women’s Component Plan in
the Ninth Plan where by identified Ministries were required to indicate the flow of funds to the women’s programmers and schemes. However the Ninth Plan refrained from making any commitment for achieving any specific goal or target. This was overcome to some extent in the Tenth Plan where for the first time, monitor-able targets were set for a few key indicators of human development. The targets include, among other things, reduction in gender gaps in literacy and wage rates and reduction in MMR.

The Tenth Five Year Plan called for the three pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and providing gender justice to create an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and thus advance gender equality goals.³

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

Though the Constitutional commitment of the nation to women was translated through the planning process, legislation, policies and programmers over the last six decades yet as the Eleventh plan approaches, a situational analysis of social and economic status of women reflects less then satisfactory achievements in almost all important human development indicators. The maternal mortality rate is estimated at 407 per 100,000 live births in India compared to figures of 92 is Sri Lanka, 56 in China and 130 in Vietnam; the growing female face of HIV / AIDS is reflected in the fact that the number of pregnant women (between 18-24 years) with HIV prevalence comprise 0.86% in 2003 of the total women pregnant compared to 0.74% in 2002.
The saga of missing daughters is vividly depicted in the growing incidence of female feticide as a result of which the child sex ratio has declined from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. While the literacy rates have shown an improvement from 39.3% to 54.3% of the total female population between 1991 and 2001, yet much more needs to be done especially for socially and economically backward regions and groups.4

Economic empowerment as reflected by the work participation rate shows that the percentage of women in the work force increased by only 3% (from 22.5% to 25.7%) between 1991 and 2001. The average wage differential between men and women showed a marked deterioration between 2000 and 2004 for both rural and urban areas. The violence against women continued unabated with the absolute number of crimes against women increasing from 1,28,320 in 2000 to 1,43,615 in 2004.

There are a number of generic reasons, which give rise to the dismal picture depicted above. Poverty is increasingly becoming feminized–mainly on account of the fact that with globalization and liberalization, a paradigm shift in the country’s economy has taken place skewed towards technology dominated sectors, rendering traditional sectors like agriculture unviable and without any security cover. Unfortunately it is in these sectors that women predominately eke out a sustenance livelihood. The lack of alternate employment, skill training, or credit facilities for women who seek it, is another factor that keeps them in poverty.

Traditional patriarchal systems too play their part in keeping women at a lower rung in the social and economic hierarchy by denying them basic rights to
land, assets etc and also placing a low value on their existence. The high prevalence of female feticide and child marriage is a fall out of these factors. The weak social infrastructure such as the lack of adequate schools or health centers, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities inhibits a very large section of women from accessing these facilities. This is a major reason why women continue to face problems as poor literacy rates, or health issues. It is also one of the reasons for the high incidence of MMR and IMR.

The changing socio economic scenario and the phasing out of the joint family system along with poor community based protection systems are some of the reasons why women are becoming increasingly prone to violence and abuse. The weak law enforcement and gender insensitivity of the various functionaries fail to check the growing violence against women.

The Tenth Plan goals of reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 1 per 1000 live births by 2012 and arresting the decline in the child sex ratio were reviewed in the mid Term appraisal of the Plan and it was found that both these goals remained unfulfilled. The mid term review also listed out the major areas of gender concern which continued to persist over the years–such as wide gender gaps in literacy and in wage rates, escalating violence against women and the rising incidence of female feticide and infanticide.

Other important concerns expressed were the growing feminization of poverty and the exploitation of women in low paid, hazardous and insecure jobs in the unorganized sector and in the export processing or special economic zones. The need to address problems relating to trafficking of young girls for
sexual exploitation and domestic labour and prevention of child marriages was highlighted in the report.\(^5\)

The mid term Report also brought a number of focus areas, which needed to be addressed if the objective of women empowerment is to become a reality. Some of the suggestions included a review of laws affecting women and children; increasing women participation in decision making and the political processes including passing of the women’s Reservation Bill; empowering women representatives of the PRI to take independent decisions. The issue of displacement and its impact on women and children was discussed emphasizing the formulation of gender sensitive resettlement and rehabilitation policy.

The Review had also made an analysis of the existing schemes of the MWCD and concluded that if significant impact has to be made in the filed of economic empowerment of women, there is a need to combine schemes like STEP, Syamsiddha and Swawlamban into one substantial scheme for SHGs for women. The Review suggested that the self-help concept should be extended to cover mass-based organizations of women working to help each other or in other words for a shift from self-help groups to Mass Organizations. Special hostels with subsidized boarding and lodging facilities were felt necessary for adolescent girls to help retain them in school and discourage their early marriage.

Specific suggestions were made of the need to strengthen the women’s component plan as it was felt that there were a number of Ministries and Departments, which had the potential to go beyond 30 per cent of funds under
WCP programmes. It also called for assessing the gender impact of all programmes as the reality was that women still remained largely untouched by gender-just and gender-sensitive budgets.

GENDER CONCERNS AND ELEVENTH PLAN

Social and Political Empowerment of Women

Though for the first time, a separate section on ‘Gender Equity’ was included in the Draft Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan, the paper has not given enough focus on women’s empowerment issues in the country. The strategy for women is confined to three areas – violence against women, economic empowerment and women’s health. There has been no attempt to understand that empowerment of women has to be visualized as a holistic integrated approach and not in a piece meal manner or as water tight compartments. More often than not, the lines dividing social, economic or political areas are highly diffused and blurred with crises crossing intersections.⁶

Over the years there have been efforts made to socially, economically and politically empower women but as a result of the lack of synergy or coordination between these activities, the outcomes could never be completely satisfactory. For example the increasing induction of women representatives into the PRIs should have meant automatic improvement in the lives of rural women, but if it has not happened, it is because the elected women were not educated or literate or even made aware of their rights. Also there are many groups of women who on account of tradition, culture, ethnic, social or religious
background are more vulnerable compared to the women in the mainstream sector. These groups need to be specially focused on in the Eleventh Plan.

It is imperative that an integrated policy and strategy be formulated that addresses economic, social, and political empowerment simultaneously and holistically along with the requisite programmes and schemes. Once such a comprehensive policy and programmes flowing from it are put in place, it will be possible to enable an all round development of women, which will usher in true empowerment. This is the philosophy of empowerment which will be the plank on which the Eleventh Plan approach to women will be based.

Keeping in view the philosophy of empowerment it is essential that the Eleventh Plan should indicate clearly the direction that the planning process intends to take for women in the ensuing five years and delineate the thrust areas. An underlying thread that will form the essence of empowerment philosophy is ‘gender equality and equity’ and ‘elimination of gender discrimination’ essential ingredients that must be inherent in the thrust areas and also incorporated as an integral part not only in all programmes and schemes for women, but also in the delivery mechanism and outreach services to the beneficiary.

Gender equality, is a constituent of development as well as an instrument of development. No country can be deemed developed if half its population is severely disadvantaged in terms of basic needs, livelihood options, access to knowledge, and political voice. It is an instrument of development because without gender equality other goals of development will also be difficult to achieve, namely the goals of poverty alleviation, economic
growth, environmental sustainability etc. A natural corollary of ensuring gender equality is the elimination of gender discrimination. Inequalities between girls and boys in access to schooling or adequate health care prove a very serious disadvantage to women and girls and limit their capacity to participate in the benefits of development.

The crucial areas of concern themselves, to a large extent, suggest the thrust areas that are required to be kept in view in the Eleventh Plan. While priority will continue to be laid on health, nutrition, education, income generating activities, relief and rehabilitation for women in distress, there are certain key thrust areas which need to be addressed with a sharper focus. These are given below:

**Nutrition and Gender**

It is acknowledged that the underlying reasons for poor health of women as well as high rates of MMR and IMR are the persisting problems of Malnutrition and anaemia. The Eleventh Plan will need to lay adequate stress on addressing both these problems with provision of adequate supplementary nutrition and micro nutrient supplements.

**Health and Gender**

The health issues of a woman if observed through a life cycle approach shows that various health problems persist right from the time she is conceived till her old age. The high rate of MMR needs to be addressed through improving the rate of institutional deliveries, training of midwife, ensuring that ANM and the primary health centers are operational. Adequate information on pre natal care and post natal care must be taken up on a priority basis.
Vulnerable Groups

Generally polices and schemes for women are formulated as if they are comprised of one composite and homogenous group. In reality there are many layers of heterogonous groups and depending on their socio economic, geopolitical background the degrees of vulnerabilities also differ. Therefore specific strategies and programmes need to be developed which will address the unique problems of specific groups. Amongst vulnerable groups, the women belonging to socially backward communities such as SC, ST or OBC face double discrimination of being a woman and also from a backward community. Similarly women with disabilities have very specific problems even when compared to men with disability. There are women who are victims of violence or sexual abuse such as trafficked women, rape victims who need a very different but specialized rehabilitation package etc. Adolescent girls are a highly vulnerable group as they are subject to a number of atrocities like trafficking, rape, child marriage. The following illustrates a list of categories of women who are in difficult circumstances.

1) Women Impacted by Violence
   - Domestic
   - Rape
   - Trafficked victims
   - Women who are labeled as witches
   - Acid attacked

2) Women impacted by internal displacement, disasters and Migration
   - Either for economic reasons
- Conflict e.g. refugee women
- Women who have been displaced because of SEZ, building of dams etc,
- Women impacted by natural or man made disasters

3) Women and Labour
- Domestic labour
- Bonded labour
- Destitute women who are homeless

4) Women in Agriculture
- Land less women
- Marginal farmers
- Agricultural workers

5) Women and Health
- Women affected by HIV / AIDS
- Women suffering from life threatening diseases
- Women with disabilities
- Elderly and aged women? Slum Dwellers? Women Prisoners

6) Women belonging to ethnic and socially vulnerable communities
- Women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities (especially Muslims)
- Women belonging to socially backward communities (SC, ST)

7) Single women
- Adolescents
- Widows
- Women whose husbands are absent due to conflict, economic migration etc
- Divorcees

The above categories of women find themselves more vulnerable on account of their unique social, cultural circumstances or because they are victims of violence or abuse. These groups require special interventions to address their needs. The possibility of developing pilot projects suitably formulated to address specific requirements may be examined.

Women Victims of Suicide by Farmers

Another highly vulnerable group are women who are left behind to take care of their children when their farmer husbands commit suicide on account of failure of crops or heavy indebtedness. These women face a whole host of problems – the possibility that they may not inherit the land holding; even if they did, they may not have the wherewithal to till the land as they do not have the necessary resources or access to credit, seeds, fertilizers etc. The problem of inheriting debts which cannot be repaid may lead to distress sale of land without alternative livelihood options. The possibility of these women and their children being exploited or trafficked for nefarious purposes is very probable.9

There is an immediate need to develop a special package for women whose farmer husbands have committed suicide. The package should contain a comprehensive inputs of programmes of various sectors like agriculture, rural development, KVIC, MWCD along with adequate support from micro credit facilities.
Globalisation and Women

With the growing globalization and liberalization of the economy as well as increased privatization of services, women as a whole have been left behind and not been able to partake of the fruits of success. Mainstreaming of women into the new and emerging areas of growth is imperative. This will require training and skill upgradation in emerging trades, encouraging more women to take up vocational training and employment in the boom sectors. This will also require women to migrate to cities and metros for work. Provision of safe housing, and other gender friendly facilities at work will need to be provided.

Another facet of globalization is related to the fact that many persons especially women will be severely affected with the advent of setting up of industrial parks, national highways, SEZ etc. as huge tracts of farm land are likely to be acquired for this purpose. This would require massive resettlement of the displaced persons and their families. It is therefore essential that a viable resettlement policy and strategy is formulated and put in place immediately which clearly reflects the needs of women impacted by globalization/displacement.

Community Based Organisations

The focus in the last few years has been to build the capacity of SHGs realizing the fact that these are in a more advantageous position to combine their resources and talents for enabling viable income generating activities, as compared to a lone individual’s efforts. Many of the SHGs have developed and flourished to become trend setters and peer leaders in their region. The time has now come to consider the transformation of those SHGs which have
developed considerable capacity and experience to further expand into larger community based organizations. Such organizations can operate on a bigger scale and therefore take advantage of their economies of scale to bring down costs and become more competitive in the markets; they are also in a position to shift from micro credit to larger credit facilities offered by banking institutions and thus will come into their own as a formidable economic force.

**Streamlining Micro Credit Finance Systems**

Micro credit will continue to remain the backbone of SHG finances and therefore will need to be strengthened and streamlined in the Eleventh Plan. There have been many instances of exploitative rates of interest charged in many parts of the country. Therefore it is imperative that the Ministry of Finance Formulates a regulatory mechanism for micro credit lending to make the system more transparent and beneficial. Ministry of Finance needs to initiate a process of broad based discussions on gender issues vis a vis Microfinance before taking any decisions regarding new regulations.

The RMK is the premier micro credit lending institution which is exclusively focused on lending to women SHGs. There is need to strengthen this institution to make it more proactive and enable it to play a pivotal and nodal role in guiding the credit framework for women SGHs.

**Women in Agriculture**

With the growing feminization of agriculture, there is need to develop specific strategies for women in agriculture. Apart from conferring land rights, it is also essential that MWCD work in close co-operation with Agriculture to
develop their skills and strengthen their capacities as well as access to cheap finance and other inputs. It is also important to strengthen organic farming which is very convenient and familiar to the women.

The gender representation in the local self government or the PRIs has been more than satisfactory. Though only one-third of seats were reserved for women by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment, the actual representation is much more at all levels. The percentages of women at district, Tehsil and village levels of Panchyat are 41, 43 and 40 respectively. Though there is a belief that these women leaders are only proxies for men, yet these women gradually become independent. In fact they have begun to contest from unreserved seats also. It has led to empowerment of not only those women who are in the Panchayats but also in the rural areas of India.¹⁰

However much more needs to be done to empower women in local self governments so that they can play a more proactive role in decision making and by their very presence encourage more and more women to come forth and demand their rights. For this capacity building is required through knowledge and education and training in diverse areas pertaining to women – such as laws and rights, programmes for women etc.

**Gender and the Law**

Though a large number of women related legislation are in place, it is seen that the efficacy of these laws are not satisfactory primarily on account of poor implementation. A major reason for this is the lack of adequate knowledge regarding these special legislations and also absence of gender sensitivity on part of the functionaries such as law enforcement, police, prosecution, medical profession, judiciary etc. The eleventh plan needs to give a very high priority to
training and capacity building of these stakeholders not only to educate them about the nuances of the laws but also to inculcate gender sensitivity in the system.

The women themselves too need to be made aware of the special legislations that are available for their protection and rights. For this purpose, awareness generation and dissemination of information on a sustained basis will need to taken up with special modules based on the region and group targets.

**Gender Desegregated Data**

One of the foremost constraints standing in the way of formulating meaningful polices and programmers is the lack of authentic gender desegregated data base. Such a data base is needed to target area / group specific programmes and also to record the number of beneficiaries accessing the services delivered by the programmers / projects as well as asses the satisfaction levels. Gender desegregated data will be specially useful in programme which seemingly appear ‘gender neutral’ but have a large women beneficiary component. It must be mandated that every programme, scheme or project when conceived will have in built mechanism to gather gender desegregated data.

There is also need to develop a Gender Development Index on similar lines as that of human Development Index so that the differentials in indicators can be established. This will also pave the way for targeted interventions for women. This should be done both at the National level and at the level of each state.
Adolescent girls are one of the most vulnerable sections of society as they are subject to a number of problems – discriminated in terms of nutrition and food (the malnutrition and anemia rates for adolescents are quite significant); school drop out; forced into sibling care, households work or even farm labour; domestic labour, trafficked for sexual exploitation; subjected to child marriages, frequent child bearing etc. This is also the period during which girls can be truly empowered to make life changing decisions and chart the course of their life in a most productive way.

At present the programmatic interventions for adolescent girls are limited and sporadic and do not address the needs and requirements as an integrated whole. It is necessary to draw up a special package for their development which will take into account inter sartorial inputs. ¹¹

The objective of gender budgeting is to enable gender mainstreaming of all sectors at all levels and stages of policies, programmes / schemes and also at the level of the implementation stage and instituting gender friendly delivery mechanisms, thus paving the way for translating gender commitments into budgetary commitments.

In the Eleventh Plan the focus should be on incorporating Gender Budgeting not only in traditional areas like health, education etc but also in so called ‘gender neutral’ sectors like Transport, Power, Telecommunications, Defense etc. The other focus areas that need to be taken up include areas, which include engendering of important national macro-economic policies and striving for intersectoral convergence. Mainstreaming and sensitizing gender concerns in various organs such as police, legislation, judiciary and trade
unions and also extending this concept to the corporate sector and other civil society organizations is another focus area.

Training and Capacity Building of the Gender Budgeting cells set up in the Central Ministers/Departments and the State governments is crucial if these cells have to become fully operational and effective. Simultaneously, there is need to undertake training for various Central and State government functionaries and also incorporate gender budgeting modules in the training curriculum both at the time of induction and mid stream training programmes.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

Institutional Mechanisms for the advancement of women include institutions of different types government, non-government, central and state government, local government, which support the cause of women's advancement. Institutional mechanisms for integrating gender perspectives in policy and planning include such innovative features as 'gender budgeting'. Though institutional mechanisms exist both at the Central and State levels, they need to be strengthened. The National Policy for Empowerment provides for strengthening the existing mechanisms through interventions as may be appropriate and will relate to, among others, provision of adequate resources, training and advocacy skills to effectively influence macro-policies, legislation, programmes etc. to achieve the empowerment of women.

The Policy also provides for setting up of National and State Councils headed respectively by the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers to oversee the operationalisation of the Policy on a regular basis and review the progress made in implementing the Policy twice a year. The National Development
Council will also be informed of the progress of the programme undertaken under the policy from time to time for advice and comments.

Planning Commission also in its midterm appraisal of the Tenth Plan has suggested in its Way Forward to undertake a high-powered interministerial review (under the chairpersonship of the Prime Minister) of gender justice in order to bring the Tenth Plan back on track regarding its commitment to gender justice or to consider a Prime Minister’s Mission on Women, Children and Development.12

ROLE OF MEDIA

The role of the Media in portraying women and the female gender as a whole leaves much to be desired. Press and the print media are generally found to unduly sensationalize traumatic events such as rape etc thereby invading the privacy of the victim. Very few positive stories of girls/women who have stood up for their rights or are achievers are published. Similarly, the electronic media and films portray serial / films highly derogatory to women, glorifying subservience of the woman before her husband / in laws, celebrating the birth of the boy child and portraying the disappointments of the family at the birth of the girl child, making out eve e teasing / sexual harassment as ‘fun’ items etc. As a result the general populace are fed on a regular diet of stories / news that are highly gender abusive, thus reinforcing traditional views that the woman are an inferior race and can be freely exploited.
The history of the present Ministry of Women and Child Development, the nodal agency for welfare, development and empowerment of women is also the history of how women as a specific group were viewed by the successive Governments. The subject of women, prior to 1986 was dealt with by the Ministry of Social Welfare. In the year 1986 a separate Department for Women and Children was constituted under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development, primarily keeping in mind that women were valuable human resources, and therefore deserved more focused attention. This also implied a subtle shift from ‘welfare’ to ‘development’ approach for these sections.\textsuperscript{13}

In January 2006 the Department was elevated to the status of a full-fielded independent Ministry, thus implicitly bringing the woman’s issues into the forefront with greater focus and a larger mandate. It also meant that the M W C D would enhance its commitment to women through wider range of programmatic interventions and outlays, advocate gender mainstreaming of other sectors.

Due the wide-ranging facets and nuances of the nature of women empowerment the programmatic interventions perforce cannot be restricted to any one particular sector or ministry/department. The responsibility has to be shared between sectors and between Ministries/Department with adequate scope for convergence and intersectoral linkages. Thus the role of M W C D includes policy formulation, conception of innovative programmes and their implementation, co-ordination with other sectors and state governments, gender budgeting, training and capacity building, monitoring the status of
women and their rights. This would require that appropriate institutional mechanisms are in place both in the M W C D, other sartorial ministries as well as the State Governments so that implementation, networking, co-ordination and convergence is possible.

**Schemes of the MWCD**

The schemes / programmers of the M W C D can broadly be categorized into those that contribute to the economic empowerment of women, those that provide rescue and shelter to women in need of care and protection and those that provide gender justice and safeguard the rights of women.

The flagship scheme for women of M W C D for holistic economic empowerment is Swayamsiddha. The scheme for economic empowerment also include the Support for Training and Employment Programme (STEP) which aims to raise the incomes of rural women by updating their skills in the traditional sectors, such as dairy development, animal husbandry sericulture, handloom and social forestry.

The Ministry has also set up support systems like Working Women Hostels and crèches to help women in their struggle towards economic empowerment. Swadhar and short Stay homes have been set up to provide shelter and care services for women in distress. The Ministry also implements laws and legislations for women including Dowry Prohibition Act, Protection from Domestic Violence Act, ITPA etc. In the Eleventh Plan, it is proposed to expand the scope and content of these schemes so as to reach more women and empower them economically and socially.14
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

“The voice of the working woman” a document of U.N.O 1982 makes a significant statistical statement. “Women make up 50% of the world’s population, comprise 33.3% of the official labour force, perform nearly 66.6% of all working hours, receive 10% of the world’s income but own less than 1% of world properly”. This statement alone justifies, serious, positive, down to earth policy on empowerment of women. It is also true that women of late have made their presence felt, with a difference, in the present male dominated society in all the spheres of work, appearing as winning competitors in decision making areas of Governance as well. In spite of such vast areas where women have proved their excellence, it is still considered as complementary to men’s efforts. They are still a suffering lot. Most of the people are eager to pray prevedic image of our women, & put them out of competition.

Durga is accepted as embodiment of Shakti & is worshiped, Sarswati is worshiped as an embodiment of learning, Laxmi is worshiped as an embodiment or wealth, Sita, Savitri are worshiped as embodiment eternal values. They claim & accept that our religion is safe in their hands. They remain in temples.

What is needed is attitudinal change. Let them be treated as individuals, on par with them as partners. Yes, they are willing to be a good mother, good wife, a good daughter, but let then also be accepted as a good partner & not viewed as competitors. Article 14, 15, 16 of the constitution of India guarantee equality before law, equal protection under law and equal opportunity of work. It prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion caste, Sex.
It permits opportunity to all. This can be possible only if attitudes of men &
women change.

It has been proved beyond doubt, that women have proved them selves,
in all spheres & this has to be accepted without any reservation. The time has
come when men of the family and & all the members of the society as a whole
give willing encouragement & patronize their efforts. They are allowed work
with dignity. Creation of warm and respectful environment & encouraging
atmosphere is the need of times. It is true that women are more sensitive to
their role, as a mother and wife. Men should actively and willing share in their
domestic obligations. This will create a sweet home atmosphere & will ensure
happy work atmosphere out side also.

Let it be accepted as a necessary well come situation and be not viewed
as an encroachment on their right to work. The issue of women and social
change in India is not as simple as it appears. Historical contingencies have
been an important factor in changing our society. Women have always played a
crucial role, inspite of the limitations imposed in each period, in bringing about
silent changes without any beat of drums.²

Historical speaking with the coming in of Aryans, patriarchy got well
established even before the varna became caste. The daughter was not
greeted as was the son in the Vedic period. Various sacrifices were performed
for the birth of a son. The Atharveda implored, “The birth of a girl grants it
elsewhere, her grant a boy”. Women were blessed to be mothers of “heroic
sons”. Vivekananda possessing the Vedic mind in this century thought, that the
educated girls, “will inspire their husbands with noble ideals and be mothers of heroic sons”.

Despite the patriarchal onslaught women did challenge the world view of their periods. While Gargi, Maithaily, Apala, etc., did so in the Vedic period Sita, Draupadi etc., did in the Epic period. When Sita is said to have spurned Ram and moved into the earth. What more rebellion do we expect? It was a nonviolent blow to patriarchy. King Ashoka had to face brave women in the battle of Kalinga which changed him thoroughly. The coronation of Razia Begum as Sultana in the early medieval period was no less an event which angered the Turks.

Mirabai flouted the patriarchal norms of the Raputana, even though for a male deity. Noorjahan and Jahanara’s role in the Mughal times cannot be easily forgotten. Come Modern period reminiscent of Rani of Jhansi, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Pandita Ramabai etc. No wonder many important contributions of women have been neglected and ignored. These women (and many more whom history has gulped), though few, are those from whom the present day feminists draw inspiration.

**Reform Movement**

It was in the 19th Century that enlightened men like Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Keshab Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyoti Bhai Phule, Govind Rande, Maharishi Karve, Bhandarkar Etc., championed women’s cause. But mot of these social reformers wanted to improve the position of women within the family as wives and mothers and not
to expand their role in society. Their micro-productive (domestic) role as nurturants was recognized by Gandhi and stretched to the public space.

**Nationalist Movement**

Gandhi’s whole philosophy of nonviolence was drawn from the life of Indian women, who quietly, ungrudgingly bore all insults and beating of their wayward husbands in order to reform them.

Gandhi has to be given the credit for involving women in the nationalist movement. He was the first mass-mobilise who saw the potential of women for an organized movement. Under his guidance in 1931, in the Karachi annual session, the Congress Party passed a formal resolution committing itself to the political equality of Indian women much before their European sisters had even won the right to vote.

**Women’s Movement**

After Independence, the Constitution came in force in 1950 proclaiming equality between the sexes, among others. Five year plans started from 1951 establishing Central Social Welfare Board and Mahila Mandals. Despite these and many other measures, the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (submitted in 1974) pointed out that dynamics of social change and development had adversely affected women and they manifested all sings of a backward group, that is, declining sex-ration, lower life-expectancy, higher infant and maternal mortality, declining work participation, increasing illiteracy, rising migration etc.

The tabling of the Report and the International decade for women heightened the awareness of people on the plight of Indian women, Women’s
movement for freedom from patriarchal practices and oppression, started. For the first time unlike other movements a movement of women sprouted, which saw them as individuals in their own right. It was no more men crusading for women’s issues but women and some men for women’s issues. This new consciousness gave rise to not only feminist (women and men) activists but also feminist-activist-researchers. And a whole body of literature appeared and continues to pour day in and day out.\textsuperscript{17}

What awakened and brought together women’s organizations all over the country to fight against oppression of women was the Mathura rape case, in 1980. Soon the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983 was passed penalizing custodial rape. No wonder, less than 35\% of our women are literate and only about 4\% go on to receive higher education. 85\% of women workers are still sediment in the unorganized sector where the legal measures have no meaning for them.

The plight of Indian women continues to be a matter of concern. What the Constitution proclaims for women, the reality springs up by opposing the very tenets, principles, ideals of the Constitution. It is side that a siege has been laid on women. They have been captured by the very institutions which attempt to safeguard and protect their lives and interests namely family, marriage, educational institutions, employment establishments, political mega-structures, policing outfits, legal machinery etc.

Whether it is child marriage, infanticide, foeticide, wife battering, sati, widowhood, bigamy, polygamy, sexual harassment, physical torture, martin cruelty, rape by intimates, strangers, dowry extortions, dowry murders,
premarital and post marital suicides etc., all these forms of oppression of women map and draw the contours of our decadent capitalist, consumerist, corrupt, patriarchal society.

Be it any denomination, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh etc., the forms of oppression of women may vary but the content is same, over-powering, emaciating and agonizing. The question is not merely of women being killed and murdered but also of the on-going throttling and murder of various emotions, ambitions of millions of young girls, that is, girl-children and women which take place on each day from sunrise to sunset.¹⁸

This does not mean that women have reconciled to this fact. The discontent is brewing amongst oppressed women. The young girls of rural and urban areas have started voicing their likes and dislikes. The employed women, though encountering role-conflict, have learnt to become firm and assertive. They now seek and demand their husband’s co-operation in performing household chores. Many men have started correcting the wrongs done by them and begun to question the patriarchal privileges given to them. Os what if 90% families are traditional. What matters are the 10% families that are egalitarian, cutting across religion, caste and class barriers.

Marriages are not always arranged now. Lots of choice marriages (love marriages, love-cum-arranged marriages) are taking place (free from dowry and gifts). Men are tending to be more considerate. Further, marriage is no more taken to be the only option. Many women prefer to remain single, while still many other couples have started living together without marriage. The awakening and liberation of the top five or six percent of the women is
beginning to have a trickle down effect in the sense of registering a greater awareness of women’s problems and restrictive social practices that affect their growth and potential.

Today due to them, women’s cause has acquired a moral and political legitimacy. Due to this today hardly any one may stand up publicly and oppose women’s fundamental rights or deny them political participation, notes Mrinal Pande. To keep up this tempo & encouraging atmosphere both men & women have play important combined role to keep peace at home & at work places.

Though in fewer numbers women have been entering the traditional male bastions, as scientists, pilots, police, engineers, architects apart from being bureaucrats, teachers, doctors, businesswoman, entrepreneurs, journalists etc. These women with one voice proclaim together “Earlier we had tongues but could not speak. We had feet but could not walk. Now we have got the strength to speak and to work”19.

**Empowerment Mechanisms**

Empowerment strategies are varied and refer to those strategies which enable women to realize their full potentials. They consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and finally factors which would free them from the shackles of custom beliefs and practices. Unless they themselves become conscious of the oppression meted out to them and show initiative to push forward it would not be possible to change their status much. Some of the empowerment mechanisms could be identified as follows:
1. Literacy and higher education.
2. Better health care for herself and her children.
3. Higher age at marriage.
4. Greater work participation in modernized sector.
6. Opportunities for higher positions of power including Government.
7. Complete knowledge of her rights; and above all
8. Self – reliance self respect and dignity of being a woman.

Several measures have been introduced to encourage women education. Incentives have been provided for larger enrolment of Girls in schools and higher seats of learning. Reduction in fees, provision of bicycles in rural areas, scholarship, exclusive schools & colleges for girls and many more literacy programmes like each one teach one, project approach, continuing education approach are other measures. The % of literacy has risen, more girls are enrolled in technical education, like medicine/engineering, Management etc. They are proving their merit in competitive examination.

Women have become sensitive to better health care for them and their children. In new Panchayat Raj System (under 73rd amendment) & in Urban bodies (under 74th amendment) they occupy 33% of the elective seats with decision making powers, which enables them implement; & oversee all such welfare programmes. Early marriage is now a rarity especially in urban area. However inspite of fixing minimum age of marriage for boys & girls, it stills occurs at places. Women organization actively works to restrict this menace.
Women are working in most of the modern sectors. Some of the sectors are exclusively owned by women, with women in higher management seats. There are a large number of self help groups exclusively for women. They are managing if with profit. This is giving them confidence.

The opportunities for higher positions of power have increased under Panchayt Raj Institutions & Municipal bodies. They have developed confidence in occupying such seats of power and function without the crutches of their male relatives. All these measures have given tremendous self confidence, respect and dignity of being women.\(^\text{20}\)

**Gender Planning**

Development of gender planning implies taking account of the fact that women and men play different roles especially in the third world and therefore have different needs and provide both the conceptual framework and the methodological tools for incorporating gender into the planning of their socioeconomic programmes.

**Role of Government of India**

The first few plans followed a welfares approach and treated women as recipients of aid. The first five year plan focused its attention on the problem of high infant and maternal mortality and then undertook steps to develop school feeding schemes for children and creation of nutrition sections in the public health departments and maternity and child health centers. The focus of second plan was on the problems of women workers. Hence policies were initiated for equal pay for equal work, provision of facilities for training to enable
women to compete for higher jobs and expansion of opportunities for part time employment.

The main thrust of the third plan was the expansion of girls education. On the social welfare side the largest share was provided for expanding rural welfare services and condensed courses of education for adult women. The fourth plan continued to emphasize women’s education. The fifth plan gave priority for training of women in need of care and protection, women from low income family’s needy women with dependent children and working women.

It is only during the fifth plan a separate Bureau of Women’s Welfare and Development (WWD) was set up 1976 as part of the erstwhile Department of Social Welfare in order to intensity the country-wide efforts launched during the International Year of the Women. The Bureau was entrusted with the major responsibility of implementing the National Plan of Action for Women besides coordinating the activities relating to women’s welfare and development.

The sixth plan for the first time in India’s Planning history contained a separate chapter on Women and Development. To make the International Women’s Decade a success it emphasized on three strategies via economic independence, educational advancement and access to health care and family planning. Hence varieties of programmes were taken up under different sectors of development to ameliorate the socio economic status of women. In the rural development sector the IRDP gave priority to women heads of households and about 35% of total number of beneficiaries under TRYSEM was women. A new scheme viz Development of Women and Children (DWCRA) was started in 1982-83 as a pilot project in the blocks of the country.
Many voluntary organizations were requested to avail funds from the government for the above schemes and benefit women. Another Programme S.G.S.Y. was launched in the Year 1999. Which provided that 50% of S.G.S.Y. groups should be for Women? They were provided facilities of loan & subsidy from the Govt. & Banks. Under Science and Technology for Women varieties of activities were taken up. Projects were sponsored for development of smokeless chullahs use of solar cookers setting up of bio-gas plants and devices for improving the water purification system. A number of technology demonstration cum training centers at selected focal points all over the country were set up by the National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) to provide expertise and resources to women entrepreneurs.

During the seventh five-year plan an integrated multidisciplinary approach was adopted covering employment education health nutrition application of science and technology and other related aspects in areas of interest to women. It is only during the seventh plan ‘Women Development Corporations’ were established for promoting employment generating activities for women.

Thus with the beginning of International Women’s Decade in 1975 a number of schemes were introduced and earnest efforts were made by the government to improve the status of women. In spite of implementation loopholes theses policies strive their best to integrate women into the mainstream of society. Thus the Department of Women and Child Development being the national machinery for the development of women plays a vital role assisted by the Central Social Welfare Board and the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development.
While the Central Social Welfare Board is an apex body with state level branches to encourage voluntary effort in the field of women’s development NIPCID is an advisory – cum – research – cum national level training institute in the field of child development with a separate division for women’s research and development. In India legislations and programmers favouring women had never been wanting. But unfortunately the spirit behind these policies is hardly appreciated by the implementing authorities.

Today, in accordance with the changing role of government, public administration has to deal not only with restructuring the economy but more than over before, with ensuring that growth is accompanied by social justice. Government has to make timely, appropriate and adequate interventions to ensure equitable distribution of the fruits of economic development as this cannot happen on its own in a market-oriented atmosphere.

Many voices are heard now, saying that the new structural adjustment programme is going to push back already marginalized groups which include poor women; that in opening up economy, we are jeopardizing the lives of women, who are the most vulnerable among the vulnerable. They would be thrown out of existing employment, perhaps into trades which entry of multinationals and increase in tourism might engender.

These warnings of gloom and doom that await the poor in India, particularly its women, with the onset of liberalization and globalization, need to be met with declaration of government intent to take measures to look after equitable distribution of the fruits of economic growth. While its role in direction, ownership and production will diminish, Government’s role must continue to
intensively intervene on behalf of the weak and the poor, so as to improve the quality of their lives. It must provide so to say, a cushion for the injustices to or the neglect of, these groups by market forces and by privatization.

**Voluntary Organisations**

In serving the cause of poor and women voluntary organizations are considered to be superior to the government for certain obvious reasons. The members of a voluntary organization are willing to spend time energy and even money for an activity which they think is good. This motivation and commitment make them work more sincerely for the cause when compared to government officials. The above argument does not mean that all voluntary organization are committed and sincere and all government departments are not so.

There are exceptions in both. But by and large voluntary organizations are better placed when compared to the government in the dissemination of development efforts as office bearers & other member are emotionally involved with the cause & are not concerned with receipt of Grant in Aid only. The second advantage enjoyed by voluntary organization is flexibility in operations. Revisions and modifications in the light of experience are possible as against Govt. organization which works with fixed predetermined norms. Thus there is feedback and learning through experience. The limited size of operations ensures efficiency and mediate accountability to the target group. Moreover a new society needs a new value system. The voluntary organizations are best suited to carry out this task.

Some NGOs keep the goal of achieving mobility i.e. they assist one particular target group and once the target group ‘takes-off’ and becomes self
reliant the voluntary organizations move on the other groups. Thus they are ever dynamic in socio-spatial terms.

Thus there are heterogeneous groups-some engaged in consistent activity some in sporadic actions the actions themselves ranging from those which providing welfare activities to those which aim at structural change. Though it is true that voluntary organizations have come a long way from mere service providers to development oriented dynamic entities they are not free from criticisms.

There are organizations which were started on a very small scale but grew up to unmanageable size taking up multiple activities to earn national level recognition and fame. Unfortunately many among them have failed to develop second line leadership and thus are slowly fading away. A few have failed to keep their size within manageable limits and hence have become inefficient units grip over their activities.

Institutions building are an important function in which many voluntary organizations have failed miserably. This refers to continuous articulation of the philosophy vision and mission of the organization among the members especially the volunteers.24 The rules and regulations and the system of functioning should be institutionalized. The democratic character of an institution can be kept up only by institutionalizing the execution strategies and programmes. The young knowledgeable educated girls need to come in large numbers & work through voluntary organizations for causes which are adversely hindering the progress of rural women.
It is also true that in the case of external interventionists (the educated elite working among the poor) are unable to get rid of their paternalistic superior attitude. They always want the target group to be dependent and subservient. They fail to appreciate the point that the target group is capable of taking over the tasks and performing well. Voluntary organizations simply fail to acknowledge that the target group has problem solving skills.

Another important drawback which afflicts many voluntary organizations is lack of funds. For many the budgets are so small that there is no provision for technical personnel. Consultancy services are also out of reach for such voluntary organizations in view of their cost. In these days when voluntary service has become highly specialized there is a dire need for the creation of an appropriate agency to provide guidance, monitor the projects and provide counseling services and arrange financial and technical assistance to needy voluntary organizations which are groping in the dark.

Women entering into the business filed are not something uncommon today. Though it is very difficult to single out the reason for the mergence of women entrepreneurship in the recent past, it is a fact that more and more women evince interest in choosing business as a career. The following are considered to be the major contributory factors: the influence of women’s movement, changing psychological attitude of women, the need to maintain a decent standard of living amidst the rising cost of living, gender discrimination in the labour market, restricted vertical mobility and above all the rising aspirations of women to lead an independent assertive life, and finally facilities offered to women for starting enterprises. Upper middle class and middle class
women with the required education and information are comparatively better off in venturing into business when compared to the poor illiterate.

While the former, with the support of other members in the family do have something to offer as ‘security’ obtain loan, the latter group of women have nothing to pledge or offer as security. These women who invariably find employment in the informal sector face problems such as job insecurity, meager wages and exploitation. Gross unemployment and underemployment suffered by them have forced these women to take up self employment, and wherever women have formed ‘groups’ they have successfully solved the problems like risk, finance and marketing in their self-employment. S.G.S.Y. is a good example to prove this.25

Fostering Self-Employment

Women are trying their level best to attain equality in various ways which are different over time and among societies. After the world War II, a large number of women in western countries resented their deprived status. There was a general awakening among women about their secondary status. They do follow various strategies to overcome subordination and to fight against gender related disadvantages directly and indirectly. Self employment is one among the many strategies and is considered to be the best strategy since simultaneously it helps to change women’s own self perception and also helps to attain social status.

The other possibility is individual strategy. Women are generally concentrated in low paid jobs, and secondary sector occupations and hence the opportunities to climb up are very limited. Their success and upward
mobility in career are much restricted. Only a few women occupy the managerial or executive position.

Female business proprietorship is an attempt to tackle this kind of subordination. Female proprietorship provides economic independence to women and at the same time they directly enter the main stream and do not remain in the periphery. Especially in developing countries, women proprietors are successful in obtaining material independence from men and this economic independence provides a basis for female solidarity. In these circumstances, individual action fosters collective action to combat subordination.

ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Education is one of the most important instruments to empower women. Education is not only a right and an end in itself, but also a prerequisite for reducing the various kinds of inequality observed at different levels. It is a well-known fact that men’s and women’s levels of schooling have a direct impact on their chances of obtaining high quality employment and keeping their families out of poverty and that education is conducive to more active and better-informed civic and political participation. When women earn, they contribute to their children’s nutrition, health and education. Despite such compelling reasons, they face a gap in education and job opportunities.

“Study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately: families are healthier and better fed; their income, savings and reinvestment go up. And what is true of families is also true of communities and, in the long run, of whole countries”.

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The need is to make young women realize their potential, to encourage them and find means of getting them the basic education and then higher education. The most urgent priority in this regard is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. We need to find means of eliminating all gender stereotyping in education because education is the way to empower our young women to become future leaders and decision makers at all levels.\textsuperscript{26}

This work studies how the higher education can empower women and what are the roadblocks on the way of higher education of women. This paper also outlines the social and psychological dilemmas faced by women in today’s changing society. It enumerates some of the international and domestic efforts made to empower women and examines the question of women’s access to leadership positions in education. The need for women to be on the educational top positions is explored and measures have been considered that could be undertaken to enroll more and more women into leader position in education.

The value of women’s education has received global recognition over the past two decades. Empowering women also work in a community where women are less valued, abused by their families, partner’s and community around them. The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education for all; however, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. In 1991, less than 40\% of the 330 million women aged 7 and over were literate, which means today there are more than 200 million illiterate women in India.\textsuperscript{27} This low level of literacy not only has a negative impact on women lives and on their economic development. Numerous studies show that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor
nutritional status, low earning potential, and little autonomy within the household. A women lack of education also has a negative impact on the health and well-being of her children. This leads towards the poor economic development of our country because women mean about one half of the country population. Hence, there are urgent need to empower women by providing higher education and their social, economical and political rights.

Education brings a wide range s for both individuals and societies, which is why it is recognized both as a human right and as instrumental to economic growth and social cohesion. Women who constitute nearly 50% of the population are the most harassed lot of the society. This is due to illiteracy, general poverty, social customs and the family taboos that prevail in various localities and the families. Added to this, male member's domination in the family has further sub-judicator women in the family. As a result of this, women are deprived of their legitimated rights, subjected to malnutrition and ill treatment and are even trusted with the responsibilities of looking after the other family members in some circumstance because of the unquestioned and challenged behaviour of the male members. According to Noble laureate Prof. Amartya Sen, in his book Development as Freedom— “Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of the political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women”.

Women work two-thirds of the world’s working hours, according to the United Nations Millennium Campaign to half world poverty by the year 2015. The overwhelming majority of the labour that sustains life—growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling
water – is done by women, and universally this work is accorded low status and no pay. The ceaseless cycle of labor rarely shows up in economic analyses of a society’s production and value. Women earn only 10 per cent of the world’s income. Where women work for money, they may be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for women – invariably low-pay, low-status positions.

The Chinese economic development is a real example as their “women hold up half the sky” aptly captures the contribution of women to economic development. In most of the modern and developed societies women are important productive agents in the economy. In addition, women take primary responsibility within families for the education and health of their members. Yet many developing countries undervalue women’s actual and potential contribution to economic and social advancement; some actively discriminate against women. In any societies, cultural biases against women suppress. Their ability to contribute to the economy.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education will make women aware of her status in the society and help them understand the level of exploitation she is facing. Literacy will also help her to understand and appreciate the efforts of the government in making the women aware of the nutrition, mother and child care, family and child welfare, etc. whereby she can help herself and her family.

“Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated disadvantages of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The national education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women.
It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators”.28

Women mainly face the problem on account of communication barriers, lack of support and absence of suitable agencies to carry the program to the women empowerment. This is common for urban and rural women both. They are being neglected in development work. India has embarked on ambitious programs of economic modernization. As part of The New Economic Policy, a close link between higher education and economy is envisaged. The development of human resources was given high priority in the government plans but opinion tends to favour public expenditure for lower levels of education rather than higher education this again a big problem for women empowerment. Quality education for women, however, is recognized as a pre-requisite for the modernization of the economy and the society. While modernization and upgradation is a key factor to receive high priority in the sphere of higher and technical education.

The women not only given higher education but it should be given the position in the society for decision-making because as we see around as a number of women are given reservation in the local bodies (Village Panchayat and Municipal Corporations) but due to lack of higher education they are unable to cope up with their male counterparts hence faces the problems and the last they have to work under the directions of their male subordinates or the male family members which gave them the status of captured and forced labour. These kinds of situations also boost the corruption in the society.
Women's access to higher education is critical at all levels of the higher education system. Over the last few decades, national policies and practices have considerably improved the participation of women in higher education, ensuring that there is an ever-increasing pool of women who are able to seek employment in the higher education sector and eventually achieve positions of responsibility within higher education institutions and ministries. But a lot still have to done.29

Despite improvements during the last two or three decades, access to higher education remains a problem for women in many developing countries. While women have fairly equal access to higher education in the more developed regions where they comprise 52% of tertiary students, their share of tertiary education in the less developed regions ranges from 33% in China to 49% in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the least developed countries, only 27% women reach the tertiary level. Poor access to higher education is accompanied by under-representation of women in science and technology and a clustering of women in the traditional female studies of arts, humanities, languages, education, nursing and medicine. In many countries, women's enrolment also decreases as they move up in the higher education system. In the area of higher education, both in teaching and management, women are still a long way from participating on the same footing as men. Women have made some progress in achieving parity in teaching but are grossly under-represented in higher education management.

The case of India illustrates the progress women have made in higher education attainment. In 1950 only 12.3% students in higher education were women; in 1960 women's enrolment had increased to 18.7%; by 1970 to 21.9%;
by 1980 to 27.5%; by 1991 to 32.9%, in 1996 to 34.2% and in year 2004 women’s share of higher education had increased to 47.8%. In India, among the disciplines, arts, science and commerce account for 88% of women in higher education. Education and law account for 94% of women students, while engineering accounts for only 1%. On the other hand in some of the developed countries, for instance in Australia, women have made strong inroads into traditionally male-dominated fields like law and business, but even there they continue to lag in traditionally male-dominated areas, including agriculture, architecture, and engineering. This is clearly reflecting in the form of economic development of Australia and the status of women there.

**FACTORS DISABLING WOMEN**

**Perspectives on Women's Role in Higher Education**

The first perspective is person-centered in which the paucity of women is attributed to the psycho-social attributes, including personality characteristics, attitudes and behavioural skills of women themselves. In developed country women have access to all the resources of self-development. So they can develop their personal skill, develop behavioural skill as per the need of jobs but it is not easily possible in developing countries.30

The alternative perspective, the structure-centered paradigm advances the view that it is the disadvantageous position of women in the organizational structure (few numbers, little power, limited access to resources) which shapes and defines the behaviour of women. The underlying premise of this perspective is that men and women are equally capable and committed to assuming positions of leadership.
Gender Imbalance in High Education

Little evidence can be adduced about women’s inability to perform on the job. Generally women act as confidently as their male counterparts. Men and women identified many similar problems and needs for training in many cases. A few problems were gender specific like mobility, the ability to visit government offices, and capital city for administrative matters; inability to socialize as much as men and therefore to be less informed on relevant issues than the men, some problems with exercising authority over sexist males and over females who expect greater sympathy, etc. Still in higher education conditions are not supportive to the women’s such as access to appropriate qualifications and training programs, job openings; access to management structures.

Discriminatory Salary Scales and Fringe Benefits

The same level of education does not bring the same return to women and men in the form of salary and other benefits. These observed differences between male and female academics may derive from barriers such as family responsibilities largely inhibiting the ability of women generally to meet the criteria identified as critical to a successful academic career. Indian women earn annually only about USS 1,471 in comparison to their male counter part who earns about USS 4,723 per annum.

Publishing Productivity

Female academics in general publish less over time than male academics. This finding is echoed in an Australian study of early career
researchers: Males had a significantly higher total publication index than females, also for publications in which they were solo or first author. Women’s performance is evaluated as less worthy and they are given fewer resources and opportunities to influence others and prove their competence, research grants, graduate students, and appointment to decision-making committees.\textsuperscript{32}

**Employment Policies**

Women are given more chance of employment at lower administrative positions. Women are recruited in greater numbers as assistant registrars and financial assistants. These positions attract a large volume of women applicants, although this kind of a administrative service provides limited opportunities for promotion, compared with the civil service. Tendency is for men to seek employment in the more lucrative public service. While there is a willingness to appoint women at second level positions, greater effort is made to seek applicants (usually men) for the top jobs, often from government service and public sector. Cases of long-serving female assistant registrars moving up to being registrars are not common. The live Example is the recent appointment of Foreign Secretary in India. When two women candidatures were denied for the same post and a male was appointed, in spite of women candidate capabilities like seniority experience, achievements and carrier records which is superior to the male counter part. There may be many more cases but not come to our notice.\textsuperscript{33}

**Segregation**

Some countries segregate women in schooling and exclude women from professional and administrative areas which limit opportunities for management
roles for women. In such contexts women are limited in the experience they can gain of wider educational planning and can never take a central role in important decision-making about education.

Social Barriers

Many social factors create barriers in the women education and empowerment. These include: male managerial styles, discourse and language that used at the work place, informal organizational cultures; women's reluctance to self-promote their achievements and complex system making them institutionally invisible.

Non-Supportive Atmosphere for Women at University

Women often self-select out of an untenable situation of working the double-day, maintaining a competitive research and publication record, sustaining an often unreasonable teaching load, counseling and supervising students, and putting in 14-hour days plus weekends in their administrative posts. Women often choose to work in the lower levels and less competitive jobs in universities for the sake of stability and permanency in their work. They reach high levels in their academic lives as associate professors and professors, but are often unwilling to put themselves forward for the management positions.

Policy for Women Empowerment

The provision of legislative and infrastructure support is must for creating an enabling environment for women. Gender equity policies and programs merely represent good intentions. The Indian Constitution empowers the state
article 15(3) to make any special provision for women and even in violation of the fundamental obligations of non-discrimination among citizens, inter-alia of sex. In view of this provision, reservation of states of seats for women in local bodies or educational institutions has been held to be valid. Similarly, the Directive Principles of state policy also has provision, (Article-39 (1); 39(d); 29(c)).

The New Education Policy (1986) and the Revised Education Policy (1992) reflect these shifting priorities in the field of higher education. “A guiding consideration in the planning and management of education is its integration with the country’s development and manpower needs”. With regard to women, the new education policy emphasizes gender equity in education. “In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women and the national system of education will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. These policies show a little good result in creating the environment for the availability of higher education to the women.”

There has been enormous growth in enrolment in higher education, from 6.45 Lakhs in 1960-61; the enrolment has gone up to 44.3 Lakhs in 1990-91. The percentage of women students has gone up from 10.1 to 32.5 during this period. Despite the increase in enrolment of women in higher education, women’s participation in the economy did not take proper momentum. Women employed before marriage willingly gave it up after marriage. “Non-utilization of valuable education was perceived as a virtue rather than a crime”. This is very true in the case of Indian women. This obviously reflects traditional nature of gender role expectations rooted through the century’s old myths and old
process of socialization. But today with the change in society thinking and values a sizeable proportion of women are opting full-time work.

Other than Indian constitution several other international laws also helping in women empowerment few of them are as fellows:

1. The United Nations (1979) convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women which sets out in legally binding form internationally accepted principle’s and measures to achieve equal rights for women everywhere.

2. The 1995 Commonwealth plan of action on gender development which provides a framework for commonwealth governments and identifies for planners and implementers fifteen areas considered desirable components of gender equity.

3. Legislation in Australia: the 1984 sex discrimination act; the 1986 affirmative action act; and the 1988 national agenda for women laid the foundations for women’s equity setting out guidelines for selection, promotion, training and development as well as reporting to an affirmative action agency.

**Role of Women in Higher Education Management**

In the area of higher education, both in teaching and management, women are still a long way from participating on the same footing as men. Women have made some progress in achieving parity in teaching but are grossly under-represented in higher education management. With hardly an exception, the global picture is one of men outnumbering women at about five
to one at middle management level and at about twenty to one at senior management level.

The empowerment of women not only need that women should have access to higher education but also have decision taking positions and powers. Various survey also draws attention to the positions that women hold within the academic hierarchy and their consequent ability to influence the policy and direction of their institution, both at departmental and at institutional level. Internationally, in the administrative-management positions, women were increasingly disadvantaged as they moved up the occupational ladder. Among the very top positions women comprised only 6.9% of the executive heads (vice Chancellors). The most encouraging statistics were for Canada (15.7%) and for Australia (15.0%), while many countries had no women vice-chancellors, confirming that for Commonwealth Universities the phrase man at the top is still depressingly valid. In the other senior management positions women comprised only 13.9% of registrars / secretaries, 8.4% deputy vice-chancellors / deputy presidents / vice-rectors, 3.2% of pro-vice-chancellors / pro-rectors / vice-presidents, 8.5% deans of faculties, 15.2% heads of departments, and 7.8% finance directors were women; but among chief librarians 29.3% were women and of personnel directors / officers 28.0% were women. The low percentage of women in these positions reflect the fact that these positions are awarded to fairly senior staff, of whom women form a small percentage. This again confirms that women are given only less or no power positions.38

The proportion of women also decreased significantly along the academic ladder. No significant differences were noted between developed and developing countries. At the next level, the reader/associate professor, less
than 20% of posts were held by women. At the senior lecturer/assistant professor level women comprised just over 25%. Only at the lecturer level women begin to be represented in numbers that equal or come close to those of their male colleagues. This again reconfirms the above facts.

**Impact of Legislative Measures**

There are few pointers to the impact of the legislative measures. However, in all the countries where legislation has been put in place, a fairly good rate of increase in women’s participation is shown at all levels. The Australian experience is particularly relevant: it has legislation in place and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting. The Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) survey on female numbers in universities revealed a higher proportion of senior women in Australia than in most of the other Commonwealth countries. India’s provision has also produced a larger than usual number of women in Asia at the helm of universities and university departments.

**Increasing the Quantity and Quality of Women Post-Graduate Students**

Better gender balance in the higher education sector may be achieved through measures to overcome the shortage of women post-graduate students able to seek employment within the higher education institutions. The allocation of special awards and scholarships to women is one concrete way of creating a larger pool of women academics. There is also evidence that special measures which improve the conditions for post-graduate studies help women achieve a greater rate of success and completion.
The problems of low women’s participation in higher education cannot merely be addressed by improving conditions of entry and employment for women in the higher education sector. This also required a legislative support in the form of laws for women safety and equality rights at work place, proper representation of women in decision-making bodies like state assemblies and national parliament. Many universities are unable to recruit women lecturers because of a shortage of women in the graduate programs. Currently, while gender balance in under-graduate studies has been achieved in most countries of the Commonwealth, there is still a dearth of women in post-graduate studies.\textsuperscript{40} Measures to overcome the shortage of women post-graduate students and creating a pool of women able to seek employment within the higher education institutions represent important steps in restoring better gender balance in this sector. Such as:

1. Scholarships and fellowships for women in post-graduate studies.
2. Improving conditions for post-graduate studies.
3. Special emphases for women in doctoral studies.

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: REALITY OR MYTH**

**GHANSHYAM N. SINGH**

There has been a long drawn debate throughout the world as to how gender equity be achieved so that women may be empowered to come as an equal partner in power sharing be it; economic, social or political. There is no denial of the fact that the women, throughout the world, have been the victim of exploitation of all shorts, may be because of the biological reason or inherent subjunctive nature in them. Even though in earlier days or even today, by sheer
individual efforts or initiative, they have far excelled than their male partner in almost every area of human achievements. The ancient literatures are galore of the verses where women have been depicted as the sole source of energy and power to get the world moving. Many the ancient saint of Hindu mythology said in the code of Manu (Manusmriti) that Yatra Naaryastru Poojyanti Ramante Tatra Devatah meaning where women are respected, divine grace adore that home. However, when it comes to practice the women are exploited in one or the other way. It has been calculated that at every movement of time the women become the victim of rape, domestic violence and subjugation in one or the other part of the globe. Then the question arises, is all that have been said good for the women are rhetoric or it has something to do with reality?

While discussing women empowerment or gender equity one should not forget that ‘male’ of ‘female’ is not the same as ‘man’ or woman’ respectively and therefore our identity should not be allowed to define our socio-cultural roles. ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ refer to biological identities. However, for a male to be masculine (and therefore aggressive, strong, a bread winner, and so on) and women to be feminine (and thus passive, obedient, polite, and a home-maker) are mythical constructs of patriarchal ‘man-made’ world. However, the contour of the present society does not follow the ethos of the subjective feminist approach of the whole issue. There are women in India who excelled men in male dominated activities like Sania Mirza (sports), Kalpana Chawla and Sunita William (Astronaut), Kiran Bedi (Police Administration), Indra Nooyi (Corporate World) and many others. Though in a microscopic area men are also being pushed to the margin like ‘mail-nurses’ or ‘stay-at-home father’ and also in few other areas. These sporadic instances can not prove the real state
of affairs either men or women status in the society. More so when we find that women had been and are still at the helm at political power in Asian Sub-Continent, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh. Even today, in Indian political system the *de-facto* power is in the hands of a woman as a chairperson of UPA Co-ordination Committee, the most powerful body of ruling alliance. These examples, though available in abundance, cannot prove the fact that the women are empowered in this man dominated masculine society. It is a well accepted fact that masculinity inhibits social egalitarianism. It is in the light of the above facts and circumstances that this paper seeks to examine the issue of women empowerment on three dimensional approach, i.e., first; global scenario of women empowerment, second; the legal backup to give strength of their empowerment and third; the specific cases of disempowerment and empowerment of women in India. On the basis of the analysis, finally, the paper would like to draw a conclusion as to the issue to the women empowerment in India as also elsewhere in the world is a reality or myth, rhetoric or has something close the fruition, a light giving or fruit bearing.42

GLOBAL SCENARIO OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Every years, the International Women’s Day is observed on March 9th with great fan fair; seminars are organized, demonstration with big banners are led by feminists and social activists, both women and men, articles in praise of women’s role in various areas are written and, at the same time, in one or the other corner of the society, domestic violence, rape, female feticide are taking place without much caring as to how the elitist culture take these issues on public forum. What these all says? International Women’s Day severs the purpose of highlighting the cause but would fall short of its expectations till the
time men are involved and women exert her rights aggressively. However, it should be practices with great caution without making a sharp divide between men and women or disturbing the family and social harmony.

Years of subjugation have made women a receiver rather than giver in the social fabric of the global system. Poor health, malnutrition and various ailments are more prevalent in women than their counterpart men. The National Family Health Survey (2005-06) says that the anemia, a mother of all diseases are more prevalent in women in India than men. It has increased over the past seven years from 52 to 56 percent among married women and from 52 to 58 per cent among pregnant women. This is the status of the health of mothers who are producing and rearing India’s future. The tuberculosis (TB) is a dangers disease for the people in the society and this disease also shows a clear gender bias with two in three TB patients in India are young women. The other part of the world is not better than India so far as gender bias is concerned. It is an acknowledged fact that two-third of the world population are prone to malnutrition and other types of social discrimination and the women fold hold a larger share of social exploitation and maltreatment in various forms than their male counterpart.43

LEGAL BACK OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

The Preamble of the Constitution of India proclaims to resolve of ‘We, the people of India’ to secure to its citizen justice, social, economic and political as well as liberty and equality of status and opportunity. The Constitution, therefore, has a chapter of Fundamental Rights and Article 32 itself is made of Fundamental Rights. The constitution expects the legislature to make laws,
executive to implement them and judiciary to interpret them in a way so as to achieve what is promised in the preamble. In the year 1976, Article 39 A was included to remind the state to ensure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and to provide for Free Legal Aid. Article 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution of India give enough scope of the protection of women from any sort of discrimination.

On the direction and guidance of the constitution of India various revolutionary laws giving equal status to women with men have been enacted in order to remove all disparities, dissimilarities against women. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and National Commission for Women Act, 1990 are first few to quote. The National Commission of women with its lady member as chairperson and members has been entrusted with task of presenting to the Central Government, the problems of women, the deprivation of their rights, and report as to their progress and development. This commission has been given constitutional status, and certain judicial powers as well. Like present day judiciary, this commission has emerged as a very active constitutional safeguard against exploitation or discrimination against women as sometime, like judiciary, it suo-motu takes the cases on public outcry and media report.

In spite of all that, the women are yet to get right of political power-sharing as the reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislature are still a far cry. It is not a mean achievement that fifty per cent of seats are reserved for Women in Pachayati Raj System in Bihar and it has definitely given a positive result so far as the empowerment of women is concerned. There are two questions that come in our mind so far as the laws vis-à-vis empowerment of women in India is concerned.

The first one is; are these laws sufficient enough to protect the women from their exploitation and is the second; is it the women only or the men folk also the victim of the access done by the other side? We get the answer to our first query fro the women activities who often say that these constitutional provision and acts are not sufficient to deal with the magnitude of domestic violence in the society. They are partially right in their assertion as the recently conducted National Family Health Survey III (2005-06) of the Government of India found that 37.2 per cent women have experienced violence in the form of physical or sexual abuse by none other than their own husbands. The survey also reveals that spousal violence is move prevalent in rural areas (40.2 percent) than in urban areas 30.4 percent). The newly enacted Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 provides effective relief to women facing violence, such as preventing dispossession from the shared household to them, this act does not make domestic violence a crime. It is only the violation of a court order in case of dispossession that makes a person guilty of an offence. 'The new Law, does in fact do something new; it recognizes the right to residence of a women in a domestic relationship household. It is this reorganization, it seems, that people find difficult to accept'. The recent
judgment of the Supreme Court of India in Batra vs. Batra case in which the court excluded the self acquired property of the in-law from the purview of ‘Shared household’ has become a eye-sore for feminists and legal activities. The answer, to the second query, is met when it find that in the middle and upper middle neo-rich class there have been some cases in which women and their family misused the provision of the law and the victims of such overenthusiastic women are the person who do not commit such crime or violence for which they used to be dragged in the court of law. In our field analysis across the society, this author, has found some cases in which excesses have been committed by women and their family rather than the men. Those people, who are aware of such excessiveness from women side fear to air their views because of an apprehension of being cornered on public platform.45 Though such cases of men victimization for dowry and other family cases are few in number. The academics have a pious duty to narrate this other side of the story of domestic violence also.

However, this sporadic examples hardly forbid us to come to a point to say that inspite, of all the legal backup and constitutional safeguards, women in India as also else where in the world are yet to ripe the fruit of empowerment and they are, by and large, victim of social, economy and political exploitation. Some activist men dominated approach like ‘The Canadian White Ribbon Campaign’ in which men question other men about violence against women or in American Society ‘My Strength is not for Hurting’ in which men can stop rape like situation has done yeoman service and these campaign will have likely spread-over effect in other parts of the world when men would take responsibility to stop or at least minimize the violence against women.
CASE OF DISEMPOWERMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Disempowerment means to be denied choice and in other words if any section or segment of society do not get the right of full enjoyment of life which includes economic, social, political or even psychological to their full satisfaction the nit is called that section of society is disempowered. The degree of this deprivation varies from region to region as per their local ethos and socio political condition. Quite contrast to this empowerment refers to the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquired such ability. In other words, empowerment entails change for the better for whom it is referred.46

The women which consists of more or less half of the population of India are, by and large, a suffering lot and victim of all sorts of exploitations. The cases of domestic violence, female foeticide, rape, etc., galore and there is hardly any day pass when such incidence of victimization is not reported in print or electronic media. This is all partly because of the fact that the children are often conditioned by gender norms. Often, when kinds are asked what their parents do, they are taught to disclosed only what their father’s do and to them, and their `home-maker mother’s do nothing’. Such norms have pushed women to the margins of socio-political and economic life. The latest round of National Sample Survey show that both in rural and urban India, for men and women, the unemployment rates, by most categories, have increased. The increase of unemployment rate in women is much sharper. It is not only from the view point of economic development or not merely for humane considerations but for the general well-being of the society economic empowerment of women is a must.
Economic empowerment of women is a must. Economic empowerment makes women-folk strong to face other odds of life. Economic disempowerment makes women ‘bread-server’ rather than ‘bread-earner’. Let us think afresh as to how fast rate of economic development empower the women so that they may get equal power sharing in all fields.

So far as individual record of achievement and empowerment of Indian women is concerned they have far excelled in their recognition and made a mark in every walks of life. Except the earlier noted names of sport person (Sania Mirza), astronaut (Kalpana Chawala and Sumita William), Police Administration (Kiran Bedi), powerful name in corporate management (Indra Naooyi) there are very many women of India origin like Kiran Desia (Booker Prize and US-based Critic Award Winner) and Arundhati Rai, who have empowered themselves by their own efforts in which their own social surroundings have played great role.

There are few cases in India where women of humble background achieved the success for which any one of high economy strata can be zealous of that achievement. To quote few, Lieutenant Commander Wahida Prizm, a 1997’s Commissioned Army Medical Corps who become the first women in the history of the Indian Armed Forces to command a passing out parade, comes from a middle class orthodox Muslims family of Kashmir. Wahida herself admits; ‘I was not born into privileged circumstances’ and ‘the village-folks were not too happy when my father decided to send me to school’ however the Armed Forces Medical Fraternity heaps praise on here by saying. ‘Wahida comes from a humble background but she’s a cut above here colleagues’. Earlier also Vice Admiral Puneeta Arora was the first women officer to reach
the three star ranks in the Army. In fact Wahida has shattered the stereotype concept that men can do things better than women. Here in this case of Wahida and Arora, find that women can reach to any height if given an opportunity to do so. Let us now, think as to how best the society can provide opportunity to reach a height equal to them to this depressed section of the society.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


9. Y. Narain, et. al., Ibid., p. 68.


12. Y. Narain et al., op.cit., p. 69.


