Chapter No. I

Introduction and Methodology
"The status of Women Reflects Character of the Country"
- J.Nehuru

1.1 Introduction

In the recent years globally there has been an over emphasis, on harnessing women’s potentials for all-round development; and the same trend has been discerned at all the global, national and local level that a women have been sharing half the sky and as such they cannot be either ignored or neglected of their active participation in the development process which is steered in the direction of bringing improvement in their social and economic aspects; the accomplishment these goals made rather easy, especially, in the context of the rapid technological development which depends upon the highest degree of intellectual caliber in terms of skill development to handle the varied and difficult sophisticated processes involved in modern development as against in the past when the man power required to possess a well-built strong physical stature which is, normally, not the forte of the weaker sex.

Women have to adjust in a number of adverse situations while performing economic activities both within outside their homes. In the words of Agarwal¹, that women supply on an average 70-80 percent of labour for transplanting, 70-80 percent for wedding and over 60 percent for harvesting they do all the husking and have important roles in seed selection and storage in every agriculturally developing country.

Near 80 percent of the total female population of the country, live in rural areas. More than 75 percent years women belonged to families of small and marginal farmers. Out of the total female workers in the country 58.2 percent belonged to migrant category and their proportion is 59 percent in rural areas. It is strange to note that more than 2/3 population of rural women is illiterate.

In the Indian Himalayas, a pair of bullocks work for about 1064 hours, a man works for 1212 hours and a women for 3485 hours in a year on one hectare farm a figure That illustrates women’s significant contribution to
agricultural production. World Economic profile of women shows that women represent 50 percent of population, make up 30 percent of the official labour force, perform 60 percent of all working hours, receive 10 percent of the world income and owns even less than one percent of world’s property.

It is also admitted in the UN Commission on the status of women that although women of the world constitute half of the population and perform two-third of the work; they earn only one-third of the remuneration; and the produce 50 percent of the food commodities consumed by the country, they earn only 10 percent of the income. Women has only 10 percent of the wealth of the country. Finally, “women have so little accesses to education that in India only 25 percent of them are illiterates”. Thus it is a fact that their contribution to the economic growth of the society is quite substantial.

Demographically speaking rural women constitute the highest percentage of women’s population in our country, but only recently in the wake of International Women’s year, followed by the women’s decade that we have tried to integrate the women in to National Planning and progress by striving to have a close look at their problems and potential.

It is a well established fact that the contribution of women to agriculture, animal husbandry and rural-based occupations is higher than that of men. But on account of the fact that they happened to be women, and on account of social prejudices, their illiteracy and lack of organization and unionization, their voice is seldom heard and their plight is hardly looked into. We often hug the petty notion that with the introduction of Science and Technology, the condition of the rural women should take a turn for better. Marginally it may have improved the quality of life to a slight degree but on a wider perspective the plight of rural women has become more pitiable since they do not get the advantage of the changes that are introduced in the field they are working in because of their illiteracy.
Women in India, representing 48.3 percent of the total population today are at crossroads⁵. A large number of Indian Women are slowly emerging out of a system that has oppressed and exploited them for centuries. Today they have pervaded every conceivable sector of the national activity and has made their indelible impression in various fields which have so far been considered the exclusive rights of men. But this is only side of the coin. In our cities and villages, a majority of the women still suffer from drastic inequalities, illiteracy, poverty despite receiving constant attention of both by the planners and the policy makers. Their life at home and outside still remains extremely arduous and monotonous.

Women hold half the sky and they are almost equal number compared to that of men. But women constitute an overwhelming majority among the poor, the programmes of economic and social development are structurally biased in favor of men. This bias is now being increasingly acknowledged, and corrective policies and programmes are being formulated in the recent days.

Integration of women in development has emerged as one of the critical issues of development. It has been one of the themes for discussion in various international and national forums. The principal relating to women emphasizes, according to U.V.N. Charyulu and et.al (1985), that women should participate and constitute on an equal basis with men in the social, economical, political process of rural development and share fully in improved conditions of life in rural areas.

Of late, the need for promotion of employment for women is often emphasized. It has been identified as one of the means for achieving improvement in the status of women. It forms part of the main areas for concerted action for the integrated development of women in rural development. It is increasingly being realized that in the poor families the income of women is vital not only to increase the status of women but for the enhancement of the living standards of their family members also. The income earned by women has a positive correlation with the nutritional status of the
family, education of the children and building up of a positive attitude towards the status of women.

The status of women has acquired great importance as they represent 50 percent of world’s population, 1/3rd of the labour force and perform nearly 2/3rd of all working hours. Yet, women receive only 1/10th of the world’s income and own less than one percent of it’s property. Women do not have access to equal skills, they are often confined to low paid jobs both in agriculture and informal sectors with long working hours and much of the invisible work they perform is non-paid and does not show up any value in the market and empowerment surveys (World Bank Country Study Report, 1991).

This has been the scenario of women not only in India but also in the entire world. All efforts are therefore necessary to establish the significant role they can play in their own development and that of society at large.

As mentioned earlier, programmes for development are structurally biased in favor of men. Therefore there is an urgent need to bring women into the process of development in order to enhance their status.

Poverty and unemployment add to the miserable plight of the women’s lot. The condition of the women living in the rural areas are worse when compared to that of the women in the urban areas and a vast majority of them are leading a deplorable life.

Therefore in the following pages, an attempt is made to present briefly the status of women in the Vedic period, Medieval period, during British period as well as post-independence period.

1.2 The Status of Women in the Vedic Period

During the Vedic period, the Indian Women enjoyed a very honored position in society as revealed by eminent scholars and sacred texts like the Vedas. According to the available sources women during the Ancient period enjoyed the right to education. They had even the right to perform yagnas in
accordance with the Vedic rituals. There are references to several eminent women scholars like Adite, Gasha, Dakshina, Gargie, Ramsha and so on, whose salutary contribution was incorporated in the Rigveda. It is a reflection on the status of women in the Vedic Age that they could remain un-married and devote their life to the pursuit of knowledge and self-realization. The important subjects in which women were educated during those days included Astrology, Geography, Veterinary Science and even Martial Arts. There were also instances when women participated in fights and wars (Meera Seth, 2001).

The outstanding works of Manu exerted a very deep influence on the position of women in society during the Ancient period. It has been referred some times between 200 B.C and 200A.D. that Manu considered women as equal to men. His famous dictum was Gods reside where women are respected and where they are insulted all efforts are useless. He urged that men should respect women and enjoined upon them to provide them with every comfort and protection. He also prescribed severe penalties for men who committed heinous crimes upon women. At the same time, he also prescribed severe penalties to women who indulged in adultery. Further, Manu denied several rights to women including the right to remarry after widowhood, whereas men could marry after the death of their wives. The husbands had the right to beat their wives if they committed any wrongs. He also insisted that a wife should serve her husband even if he is band or adulterous (Vani Mohan, 2004).

However, on the whole, the attitude of Manu towards women is rather positive. He emphasized that no society can prosper if the women are unhappy and no family thrives if the women are ill-treated and disrespected. Manu was very emphatic and clear that women should be protected and also be respected as the propagators of the race. Thus, Manu adopted a favorable approach towards women which was suited to the needs of the society of the times. Nevertheless, it is often described that Manu had exerted a dreadful effect on
the position of women and his work was most often quoted to depict the vulnerable position of women in the Indian society (Vani mohan, 2004).

1.3 The Status of Women in the Medieval Period

During the Medieval period the position of women in India particularly that of the middle and lower class, deteriorated due to the invasions of the Muslim rulers and the consequent onslaught by Islam. Women led a miserable life in all respects. During this period, women were subjected to several inhuman practices and harassment and most of them worked as domestic servants. They lost many of their rights. Further, the preservation of the Hindu race from the Muslim rulers not only required their protection but also their seclusion and non-participation in public activities including politics. The system of Paradah was practiced by women, particularly by those belonging to the upper classes and royal families. Child marriages became very common for various reasons. It had an adverse effect on women’s education and most of them could not get education. Divorce was not permitted in the case of women. Another heinous practice known as Sati was widely practiced, particularly among the women of royal families. There were innumerable instances of Sati practiced by the higher caste women. It was more widely prevalent in Rajasthan than in other parts of the country, particularly, among the women of royal families. But this practice was rare among the women of middle and lower classes. However, available evidence suggests that the position of the entire women folk was not deplorable. Evidently, the position of women who belonged to the royal and aristocratic families was better when compared with those belonging to the poor and middle classes. They used to enjoy higher status and respect in the society. They had equal rights with the men and even enjoyed political power by occupying important positions in the political machinery.
1.4 Status of Women during British Period

The British administration and also the various political and social movements started during that period exerted considerable influence on the lives of women. The British evinced some interest in the uplift of women and initiated certain measures for promoting their welfare (Neera Desai and Krishna Raj, 1990). The nineteenth century can be considered a watershed in the history of Indian women, as several developments took place which resulted in far-reaching changes in their conditions. The two evil practices, Sati and female infanticide, were banned by the British government during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Indian Penal Code introduced in 1861 contained certain provisions that help women. The British government also promoted education among the girls through the establishment of separate schools for them. However, the British government did not evolve any specific policy framework for the welfare of women. They took a few measures on ad-hoc basis for the betterment of women in response to the pressure from the enlightened public and social reformers.

Various social and religious reformers seriously tried to reform the Indian society and to improve the life of the people including women. Raja Rammohan Roy, Krishna Chand, Eswar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Veeresalingam and others fought for the cause of women in several ways. Raja Rammohan Roy of Bengal started the Brahma Samaj in 1920 to reform the Hindu society by eradicating early marriages of girls, Sati and other social evils. He tried to end those practices by encouraging widow marriages.

Kesav Chandra Sen and Vidya Sagar carried further the cause of women espoused by Raja Rammohan Roy and started a movement in Bengal against child marriages. They worked sincerely for the enactment of the widow remarriage Act of 1856 by the British government. Apart from these eminent reformers from Bengal, a few reformers from other states also took up the cause of women and started reform movements for women's emancipation. The main thrust of these social reforms was uplift of women by ending the evil practices of Sati and female infanticide.
practices existing in society which subjected women to untold misery and also to improve their socio-economic conditions. These reformers gave top priority to education of women and hence started a number of schools throughout the country for girls which had a profound effect on women (Desai, 1969).

Under the impact of the spread of western education during the British period, women organized themselves for improving their conditions and they also started participating in the National Movement during the first part of the twentieth century. Under the inspiration of Gandhi, women from all parts of the country took an active part in the freedom struggle. The National Movement witnessed the emergence of several women leaders during different stages of the movement, who played a major role in the various events organized by the National leaders. During the early phase of the National Movement, Susila Devi, Hera Devi of Punjab, Sarala Devi of Bengal and others became prominent and led the movement in different capacities. During that time, Annie Besant started the Home Rule Movement with the aim of achieving self-government for India. She became a very powerful force in Indian politics and awakened the masses to organize for self-government. For her contribution to the freedom struggle, she was elected President of Indian National Congress in 1917. She had the credit of being the first women president of the party since its inception. She also fought for the women's suffrage and led the boycott of foreign goods and Swadeshi Movements launched during the first part of the twentieth century.

Another important women leader in the National Movement was Sarojini Naidu. She played a prominent role in the Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement, Non-Co-operation movement, the agitation launched against the salt laws and so on. She also led several activities for improving the conditions of Indian women. She was elected President of Indian National Congress in 1925 and conducted its activities efficiently. She was closely associated with all activities of Gandhiji and also acted as the chief spokesperson of the Congress for a long time. Apart from these women leaders,
a number of other women leaders played an important role in the freedom struggle (Aparna Basu, 1976).

Thus, during Vedic period, the women enjoyed a honorable status. During the Medieval period, the status of women, especially of the middle and lower classes, deteriorated due to the invasions of the Muslim Rulers. During this period, women were subjected to several inhuman practices and harassment and mostly they worked as domestic servants. Women led a miserable life in all respects during this period.

However, during the British period, because of the social reforms there was some improvement in the status of women. The evil practices such as Sati, female infanticide were banned by the British government. Child marriages were controlled. Girl’s education was encouraged not only by the British government but the social reformers also.

1.5 Status of Women after Independence

The status of women after Independence is analyzed with the reference to demographic profile, levels of literacy, work force among women and women specific policies.

**Demographic Profile:** In India, women constitute almost half of the total population. According to the 2001 Census, women were 495.7 Million in number as against a total population of 1027.01 Million and thus they constituted 48.26 percent of the total population of the country. There was a slight increase in the female population of the country as it increased from 407.1 Million in 1991 to 495.7 Million in 2001. While the increase in terms of percentage was extremely marginal, i.e., 0.2 percent, in terms of absolute number it was 88.6 Million as against 77.1 Million between 1981-91. The growth of female population for the 1991-2001 decade was 21.79 percent, which was more than that of the total population which had increased by mere 0.896 percent during the period. Further, the life expectancy at birth among the
females had been steadily increasing over the years, from 23.3 in 1901 to 65.3 in 2001, and has surpassed that of males since the 1980s.

However, according to 2011 Census, India has a total population of 1,210,193,422 out of which men and women constitute 51.54 percent and 48.46 percent respectively. Decadal growth rate (2001-2011) is found to be 21.54 against 17.64 for the decade 1991-2001. The sex ratio is found to be 940 females per thousand males. The density of population is 382 per sq.km. the total literates in the country are 77,84,54,120 who constitute 74.04 percent. Among the literates, the male and female represent 57.06 and 42.94 percent respectively.

**Literacy:** Since Independence there has been a spectacular growth in the literacy rate of the country. The total literacy rate, which was 5.39 percent in 1901, rose to 73.80 percent in 2011. The striking feature of the growth in the literacy rate is the prevalence of wide gap between the male and female literacy rates. This is obvious from the fact that the female literacy was extremely low in 1901 as it was only 0.60 percent. It increased gradually to 7.30 percent by 1941, which was less than half of the total literacy rate of 16.10 percent. The gender gap in the literacy rate during this period (1901-41) works out to almost 100 percent.

The sex-wise literacy rates from 1951-2011 are presented in Table 1.1. The table reflects that the literacy rate increased from 18.01 percent in 1951 to 73.80 percent in 2011. This increase is more striking in the case of women as it increased from 8.86 percent in 1951 to 65.46 percent in 2011. The corresponding figures of men are 27.16 percent and 82.14 percent for the same period. If we compare the female literacy rates of other periods with that of males in 2011, we can notice certain important trends. The Census figures reveal three-fourths of the men and more than half of the women of seven years and above age group are literate. With the faster growth of female literacy, the gap between the male and female literacy is fast getting narrowed (Census Reports, 1951-2011).


Table 1.1

Literacy Rates among Women in India over a Period (1951-2011)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75.85</td>
<td>82.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>54.16</td>
<td>65.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>18.01</td>
<td>27.50</td>
<td>33.50</td>
<td>43.50</td>
<td>51.50</td>
<td>65.01</td>
<td>73.80</td>
</tr>
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Source: Collected from the Reports of Census of India, New Delhi, for the years from 1951-2011.

Thus, it is evident that the gender gap in the literacy rates has been declining, if not at the same rate. In absolute terms, the number of literates among the women has increased from 155 lakh in 1951 to 1260.60 lakh in 1991. In spite of this steep increase, there are still 1956.4 lakh illiterate women in the country. Thus, literacy is glaring among the women, in spite of the fact that the government has committed itself to the goals of total literacy and free compulsory primary education for all, which has been reiterated in very successive Five Year Plan since the First Plan. The recent research studies which explore the position relating to women’s literacy point out that the important feature that remains consistent in the literacy situation in India is the existence of large disparities in literacy achievement between different sections of population, based on gender and residence (Meera Seth, 2001).

The position of literacy among the SC (Schedule Castes) and ST (Scheduled Tribes) women is even more dismal. The data available from 1961 onwards in this respect reveals this fact. In 1961, the literacy rate was as low as 3.29 percent among the Schedule Caste women and 3.16 percent among the Schedule Tribe women. This rate increased at a faster rate as it has almost doubled to reach 6.44 percent in the case of Scheduled Caste women. But it rose slightly in the case of Schedule Tribe women as it increased to 4.05 percent by 1971. They increased further to 10.93 percent and 8.04 percent among the women of Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes respectively by
1981. Again these rates doubled to reach 23.76 percent and 18.19 percent among the women of both these categories respectively by 1991. It can be noticed that the gender gap between men and women is wide both among the Schedule Castes and the Schedule Tribes. Though the gap was for the first time 100 percent in 1991, it was more than this during the earlier period (Census Report, 1951-2001).

1.6 Workforce among Women

If we look into the statistics provided by the census and other agencies, we can notice that the share of workforce among women is very limited when compared with that of men. It is rightly observed that the economic empowerment of women is very essential for improving their position in society. It is also pointed out that women’s employment leads to the development of not only women but also their families. However, since the beginning, women in India have lagged far behind men in respect of employment. Traditionally, women in this country economically depend upon their male counterparts. This dependency syndrome still continuous to prevail.

The available data indicates that the distribution of men and women in the organized sector is highly unfavorable to women. As per the 1971 Census, out of the total workforce among women, only 19.30 percent worked in the organized sector and they constituted only 6.16 percent of the total workforce in the country. However, there has been an upward trend in this number. In 1981, their number went up to 27.93 percent which further rose to 37.81 percent by 1991. In the organized sector a majority of the women are found working in the private sector rather than in the public sector.

As per the 1991 Census, of the total women population of 4033.70 lakh, 897.70 lakh were employed, which accounted for 28.58 percent of their total population. Thus, it is evident that a vast majority of the women, i.e., 71.42 percent of the total women population, are non-workers. It can also be noted that the main workers among the women workforce was limited as they
accounted for only 26.43 percent (642.70 lakh). In contrast, the male main workers were 2216.60 lakh in number accounting for 73.57 percent of the total workers (Census Report, 1991).

In 1971, women workers in the public sector constituted eight percent of the total workforce which rose to 9.7 percent in 1981 and to 12 percent in 1991. In the private sector women labour accounted for 16 percent of the total workforce in 1971 which went up to 17.5 percent in 1981, and to 19.3 percent in 1991. It needs to be emphasized that like the organized sector, the ratio of male to female workers in the unorganized sector is also unfavorable to women.

1.7 Women Workforce in Unorganized Sector

In India, owing to several cultural factors women enter into the informal or unorganized sector more easily than into the formal sector. Hence, they are found more in the formal sector than in the formal one. It is estimated that an overwhelming number of working women are involved in the informal sector which are not included in the official statistics. The jobs in the informal sector include domestic servants, small farmers, artisans, small traders and farm laborers. Most of these jobs are unskilled and are low paid. Further, they do not offer any benefits and privileges to the workers. They have hardly any labour rights under the existing laws and acts. As per the 1971 Census, of the total women workforce, 93.84 percent work in the unorganized sector. This percentage has slightly increased in the subsequent periods, as it rose to 93.87 percent in 1981 and to 95.79 percent in 1991 (Census Reports, 1951-91). The corresponding figures for male workers are 89.57 percent in 1971, 89 percent in 1981 and 89.77 percent in 1991. This indicates that the share of women workers is much higher than that of men in the unorganized sector (Census Reports, 1951-91).
1.8 Women –Specific Polices

The Government of India adopted a multi-pronged approach to improve the socio-economic conditions of women and to promote their welfare along with the legislative enactments, it formulated several polices during different periods addressing their problems and grievances with an aim to achieve their all round development and empowerment. These polices clearly reflect the approach and strategy of the government towards women’s issues.

The national plan of action for women adopted by the government in 1974 became the guiding policy for its attempts at the uplift of women. The National Expert Committee on Women Prisoners examined the conditions of women prisoners and suggested certain reforms in the existing judicial and prison systems for the benefit of women prisoners. The National Perspective Plan for Women was adopted in 1988. It intends the main streaming of women’s issues in the public policy making and sets a long term policy perspective for both safeguarding their rights and promoting their economic well being and social empowerment. The Plan envisages an alternative strategy for women in all the policies and programmes of the government in order to create a democratic, egalitarian, secular and social fabric in the country. it also set out specific targets to be achieved by 2006 in the field of women’s education, such as elimination of literacy, universalization of elementary education and minimization of drop-outs, stagnation and so on. The plan also proposed several measures for the achievement and development of women within the framework of the existing developmental parameters. The report of the National Commission on self-employed women and women in informal sector examined the wide ranging issues relating to women workers in the unorganized sector and made a number of suggestions for promoting the welfare of women working in the unorganized sector.

Apart from the women specific policy initiatives, there are special provisions within the general policies which focus on the issues relating to women. The National Policy on education of 1986 emphasized the promotion
of vocational, technical and professional education among women at all levels. The policy envisages that the national system of education should play the interventionist role in the empowerment of women. The National Health Policy accords a special place for women in the programmes and schemes in the field of health. The National Plan of action for the Girl Child 1991-2000 proposes an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy for ensuring the survival, protection and development of children with special gender-sensitivity development for the girl children. The National Nutrition Policy of 1993 suggested various short-term and long-term measures for the provision of nutritional food in the case of women and children (Meera Seth 2001).

The year 1999 is of great significance for Indian women. In this year, the National Commission for Women was set up to safeguard the rights and interests of women. The Commission is a statutory body constituted under the National Commission for women Act 1990, with the objective of reviewing the implementation of various protections and safeguards provided by the Constitution for women and also the various legislations meant for them. It also functions as an agency that supervises the redress of the grievances of women. During the decade of its existence the Commission achieved certain spectacular results. It is reported that the Commission has highlighted the various problems faced by the women, particularly, those belonging to the weaker sections like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, widows and those living in slum areas. The Commission has made an in-depth examination of the various existing acts meant for the women and suggested measures to plug their loopholes, and to make further laws for their benefit (Vani Mohan, 2004).

Further, the National Commission created awareness regarding women problems and also sensitized political leaders and the public officials concerned about women’s issues. The Commission has also provided a platform for various voluntary agencies for interaction and discussion of the issues relating to women and their problems. The Commission has been making efforts for the
operationalization of the various provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which provides reservation of seats for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Another important landmark in the history of women welfare in India is the Enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992. These acts revolutionized both the rural and urban local bodies, the Panchayat Raj Institutions and Municipal Bodies. They provide for the reservation of 33.3 percent of the political offices for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations.

The Panchayat Raj Elections which followed the enactment of these acts gave representation to about eight lakh women in those bodies across the country. Thus these two acts are certainly a revolutionary step in the direction of political empowerment of women. The various research studies conducted on the implementation of these two acts in different states reveal that there has been considerable awaking among women after the implementation of these Acts.

There is also significant increase in their participation in the political process at the grassroots level. The political empowerment affected by these acts among women has its impact on their socio-economic conditions. The National Perspective Plan for women (1998-2000) summarizes the health situation of Indian women by stating that malnutrition, disease, disability and even death at critical stages of their lives, namely, early child hood, adolescence and reproductive phase are common among the women of India. The sex-ratio is an indicator to analyse the gender inequality in the country. Discrimination against female sex has been declining.

The above aspects clearly indicate that there have been meaningful efforts to protect the women rights by providing their various opportunities different spheres for their development. If these efforts are continued with much more concentration and commitment, certainly, the status of women will
be enhanced and thus women empowerment can be achieved. The empowerment of women contributes significantly to the social and cultural development leading to the rapid economic development of the country. In view of this, in the following pages an attempt is made to examine the concept of empowerment, the importance of women empowerment, the strategies pursued by the government to empower women before and after Independence.

1.9 Concept of Women Empowerment

Empowerment of women involves many things-economic opportunity, social equality and personal rights. Women are deprived of these human rights, often as a matter of tradition. In rural areas, women are generally not perceived to have any meaningful income generation capacity, and hence, they are relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labor. Without the power to work and earn a good income, their voices are silenced. Even in matters of sex and child bearing, women often do not have the ability to oppose the wishes of their men.

In a society where men control the destiny of women, how is it possible to empower women? Simple encouraging women to resist the wishes of men would not only fail, but would create mistrust of any goodwill attempts from “the outside” to help rural communities. Women will gain power only when both men and women begin to respect and accept the contribution of women. Developing women’s capacity for income generation without threatening men is key.

Past experience has taught us that attempts to control the number of children through behavioral changes in men have failed because families do not see the benefit of fewer children. Children, especially boys, are viewed as extra hands that can provide income and help with family chores. The poorer the family, the more children they seek. Hence, it is evident that the economic status of the family plays a major role in family planning. Birth control and reproductive health of women are behavioral issues affected mostly by
economics, access to health care, and education. Until this reality is accepted, the desired changes may not be attainable in the foreseeable future.

Education plays an important role in bringing about awareness on women's rights. When both boys and girls grow up with mutual respect and understanding of their capabilities and roles in the society, women are more likely to find their rightful place within the family and the community. But, sadly enough, rural education perpetuates the myth that boys are inherently superior to girls. This is further reinforced by the family, where even mothers tend to give more attention and opportunities to their boys.

Empowerment is defined as "giving power to, creating power within and enabling". In this sense, empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which enables individuals or groups to realize their full potential and powers in all the spheres of life. Empowerment is a process which helps people to gain control over their lives through rising consciousness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control. Empowerment is also a feeling that activates the psychological energy to accomplish once goal. In other words, empowerment can be regarded as a process of awareness and capacity building that leads to greater participation, better decision making power and transformative action.

Empowerment covers both individual and collective transformation. It strengthens one's innate ability through acquiring knowledge, power and experience. Empowerment emphasizes both individual and collective efforts. It is through involvement in groups that most people begin to develop their awareness and ability to organize, to take action and bring about a positive change.

There is also a definition considering empowerment as the strengthening of capacity achieve through full participation of people in various process. Viewed in this sense, empowerment envisages capacity and building and development of the skills, especially, to take decisions, organize and manage to
carry out the activities and to deal with people and institutions around them. It also facilitates participation and ensures greater control and decision making power at home, in the community and society.

In the opinion of Batlaivala (1995), empowerment may be considered the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining control over the sources of power. Empowerment presents the means of accomplishing community development tasks and can be conceptualized as involving two key elements: giving community members the authority to take decisions and choices and facilitating the development of knowledge and resources necessary to exercise these choices.

It is held that the concept of empowerment itself is highly contentious although a body of evidence exists that documents some significant change in women's self-perception, confidence and roles, there is also countervailing evidence that suggests that the mere empowerment of women does not guarantee their all-round development.

Thus empowerment is a positive concept concerning the capacity of the individuals for self-action and transformation of the self. It enables people to become active participants in the creation and implementation of the policies, decision and all other process which affect their lives. Empowerment also makes them take responsibility for their own choices, decisions and actions. It develops resources, information and knowledge and makes them accessible to opportunities. Empowerment is an effective answer to oppression, injustice and other maladies of society with emphasis on the building of economic and social capabilities among individuals, classes and communities to bring about social transformation.

The Global Conference on women's empowerment, 1988, highlighted empowerment as the surest way of making women "partners in development". Development, on the other hand, should ultimately become a process of
empowerment. Empowerment is an active process enabling women to realize their full identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of life.

Although women form nearly half of the human capital in the country, they are still the most deprived and neglected segments of society despite the constitutional guarantee for equal rights and privileges for men and women. Women continue to be victims of a process of economic, social, cultural and political marginalization. They are viewed as homemakers and are not encouraged to undertake professions to which men have a natural access. On the other hand half of the world’s food is produced by women working in the fields and they constitute one third of the world’s labour force, and a woman does double the amount of work and contributes doubly to the economy.

Empowerment is a multifaceted process encompassing aspects such as enhancing awareness, increasing access to resources-economic, social and political. It comprises an equally important component of mobilization and organization of women into groups because these groups form the basis for solidarity, strength and collective action.

Empowerment of women is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty, as women are the key contributors to the economy and to the combating of poverty through both remunerative and un-remunerative work at home, in the community and in the work place (United Nations, 1996). Gainful employment has been viewed as a critical entry point for women’s integration in development (Devadas, R.P., 1986).

Women’s participation in income generating activities is believed to increase their status and decision-making power. With employment, women do not remain as “objects” of social change but become its “agency”. They cease from being consumers of economic goods and services and turn into “producers”. They participate in social reproduction as well as reproduction of labour for the next generation (ILO, 1984).
In many cases, micro credit has been a crucial elements in increasing women’s economic opportunities. When done well, it gives women the ability to make a living on a sustainable basis. Micro credit could unleash the economic potential of hundreds of millions of the world’s poorest.

The country’s response to the challenges of equality, development and peace is the “empowerment strategy”. The challenge before the society is to evolve strategies to break the stereotypes of the past by solving problems of poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation, violence, gender inequality, etc. Hence, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Micro Credit should be seen as components of solution to accelerate the socio-economic development, particularly of the rural poor women in India. A judicious mix of micro credits SHGs along with other activities with emphasis on the development and empowerment strategies and processes, would certainly make micro credit an effective instrument of social and economic development, particularly of women in a holistic and integrated manner (Sinha Archana, 2002).

In the light of this, micro credit was launched to reach many of the poorest families eighteen months after the Beijing Conference on February, 2-4, 1997. More than 2900 people representing 1500 institutions from 137 countries gathered at the Micro Credit Summit in Washington, DC. Together they set the ambitious goal of reaching 100 Million of the world’s poorest families, especially, women of those families, with credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the year 2005, bringing women into the fold of SHGs (Government of India, 1999).

SHGs are voluntary association of people formed to attain a collective goal. People who are homogenous with respect to social back ground, heritage, caste, economic activity or traditional occupation come together for a common cause to raise and manage resources for the benefit of the group members.
The process by which the group people with a common objective are facilitated to come together in order to participate in the development activities, i.e., savings, credit, income generation, etc.

Although the SHGs can be formed for any development activity, the SHGs should be practicing thrift and credit and be familiar with money management (Srinivasan, Girija, 1997).

Generally, SHGs encompass several activities of men and women but the India’s focus is on the financial aspects of SHGs. In addition to India, this financial SHG concept is being promoted in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. the salient features of SHGs are:

(i) Homogeneous in terms of economic status and interest and affinity.
(ii) Small in size and their membership per group ranges from 10 to 20.
(iii) They are non-political and voluntary and follow democratic culture.
(iv) They hold weekly meetings mostly during non-working hours.
(v) They have transparency among themselves with collective accountability of financial transaction in the group.

Functions

(i) Conduct regular weekly meetings;
(ii) Promote saving attitude and habit among the members;
(iii) Indulge in credit management;
(iv) Build the common –fund slowly and systematically; and
(v) Establish linkage with banks and government departments.

SHGs are necessary to overcome exploitation, create confidence for economic self-reliance in the poor, particularly women who are mostly invisible in the social structure. SHGs become the basis for action and change and build a relationship of mutual trust between the promoting organization and the rural poor through constant contact and genuine efforts (Gupts, R.C 1993). Credit delivery through thrift and credit groups (SHGs) emerges as an
alternative to the existing system of credit disbursement by the banks. SHGs have been found to help inculcate among their members sound habits of thrift, saving and banking (Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, 1995).

Satis, P. and Das, P. (1997) strongly pointed out that self-help approach is fast gaining acceptance internationally as the most appropriate instrument to reach out to the poorest of the poor in a most effective way. Experience in various countries has brought to light the fact that SHGs play a significant role in mobilizing substantial amounts of savings and providing loans to the members. SHGs have also been able to bring about positive improvement in a number of social indicators such as literacy and health (Shiva Kumar, L, 1995).

SHGs promote participatory credit management and fill a vacuum created by the ineffective, rigid formal credit necessity by adopting a flexible mechanism, sensitive to the needs and conditions of the people for whom these are meant. Rescheduling of loans in times of genuine hardships, recognizing the consumption requirements of the people along with their production needs and the need to address social problems are all considered (Dwaraki and Kumarasan, B, 1997).

The benefits of SHGs, which have primarily been formed in India as micro-credit groups for economic empowerment of women and the weaker sections, are that they provide a via media for development of saving habit among the poor; have access to large quantum of resource; provide a window for better technology and skill up-gradation; have access to various promotion assistance and assurance of freedom, self-reliance and empowerment. Collectivization implies cohesion of the group and enables the members of the group to perceive common interests and act collectively. In contrast to formal organizations. Self-Help is highly personal, non-hierarchical and without division of labour. Self-Help favors experience over expertise (Murugan K.R. and Dharmalingam, 2000). The above view clearly stresses that there is a great need to bring the rural women into the fold of SHGs to solve their own problems individually and collectively on democratic lines.
1.10 Rural Women’s Status in Unorganized Sector

Women constitute more than half of the world’s population. They are seen as the main contributors to the back bone of the economy of any country. In our country, women work very hard, even more than men, in both rural and urban sectors. Women play dual roles as housewife and paid worker. While in urban sector, women hardly get any help from the family members. Even if she gets, it is again from the female child.

In rural areas, hard, routine, long duration tasks, repetitive and monotonous works are performed by women. Washing clothes and dishes, fetching water and fuel, sweeping, swabbing and child care in household sector; transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing paddy, plucking flowers and vegetables in agriculture and allied works in other sectors are carried out by women. Purchasing of goods, savings and investment tasks, taking all economic decisions in household sector, supervising the work of labourers, ploughing of land with mechanized equipment, fertilizer and pesticide spraying, selling of produce in agriculture is carried out by men. Men are indulged in the activities that require physical strength and energy, knowledge and skills, personal interest and capability.

In Rajasthan, men refused the work of plucking chilies, which burns their hands. In Andhra Pradesh, plucking of cotton is done by women and it involves much inconvenience with the dried twigs and thorns field. Women spend two hours to pluck one kg cotton, 21/2 to three hours to dehull 1 kg maize and remove tamarind from the sticks. Most of the horticulture crops harvesting is done by women only, like plucking bhindi, tomato, beans, flowers such as jasmine, chrysanthemum and mary gold which again are time consuming and patience requiring tasks. In M.P. and Bihar, women carry 12-40 kg of fuel and fodder on their heads every day, some times walking as far as 10 km to sell the fuel and fodder, while men carry fuel on a bicycle, tractor, and bullock cart. Water is carried on head by women while men carry water on a bicycle or any two wheeler. In forestry activities, women spend nearly two
days to collect one kg honey and 10-12 days to collect 10 kg of gum. In M.P.
and Gujarat, spice pounders are mainly women. Drying, cleaning the seeds and
grinding chillies, pickle and papad making is done by women. In West
Godavari Districts of A.P peeling of prawns and packaging in processing
industries is done by women only.

Women are subjected to drudgery in carrying out all these activities.
Due to the continuous bending in collecting fuel and fodder, weeding and
transplanting, there is a great physical strain and distress. Postural defects lead
to problems like bent backs, pain in legs and calf muscles, shoulders and arms,
thorn pricks, sore and infected feet with fungal growths.

While carrying water, there are incidence of miscarriages apart from
intense pain in different parts of the body especially, the legs, waist and
shoulders. Head loading activities are leading to accident injuries, insect bites,
thorn cuts and skin burns, tetanus and strain during pregnancy. Rural women
are more prone to cough, bronchitis, irritation of eyes, nose and throat, eye
diseases, and carbon monoxide toxicity due to exposure to dust, fumes and fuel
smoke while cooking food.

The average working day for women is between 15-16 hours per day.
Out of which 6-7 hours is spent on farm related activities, six hours in cooking
food, fodder and heating water, two hours in child care and only 1-2 hours /day
is available for leisure time activities. The type of tools and equipment used for
the purpose of doing these tasks are labour consuming devices. Though various
technologies and programmes are designed to reduce the drudgery of rural
women, they have benefited little. Especially, in agricultural sector, certain
machinery had displaced the women and children from work, thus leading to
even lower status of them. For eg: maize dehulling machine, banana fiber
extraction machine etc. cannot be operated by women, hence, they are
displaced by men. Even if women are carrying out the same task as men do,
women are always paid lower wages as compared to men. There is a wide
disparity between the wages of men and women in all sectors of employment.
The wage differentials in India tend to be higher in rural as compared to urban areas, and are higher among women than among men. The wage differentials also tend to be higher for low-skilled workers. As per National Sample Survey Organization report 2004-2005, the difference of wages and salaries between rural and urban women employee is Rs. 67.66. The average wages/salaries of a rural and urban women employee per day are Rs. 85.53 and Rs. 153.19 respectively. Therefore this disparity in wages between rural and urban women could be attributed to difference in the nature of activities carried out by women in these areas. Moreover workers engaged in the unorganized sector do not have the benefit of several laws such as the Minimum Wages Act or the Factories Act. They are also not covered by statutory welfare measures such as maternity benefits, provident fund, gratuity, etc.

Various measures have been taken to reduce the drudgery of women by teaching them body mechanics labour saving devices and imparting better skill to carry out the tasks. Though government departments like department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources have introduced energy saving devices like improved chulha, solar dryer, solar photo voltaic cells, bio-gas plants etc., again these are not completely women friendly devices as it requires men's help in maintaining them, thus leading to low functionality rate. For instance, one village irrigated its fields through a bucket system in which women were very active. When the village replaced the manual irrigation system with a tube well irrigation system, women lost their jobs. Many other examples exist where manual tasks such as wheat grinding and weeding are replaced by wheat grinding machines, herbicides, and other modern technologies.

However, other drudgery reducing equipment and tools like cot bag or harvesting bag to reduce back pain while harvesting cotton, mirchie and other vegetables; ring cutter to cut bhindi and brinjal with ease; water trolley which can hold two big water holding utensils that can be pushed easily by women; improved sickle for better weeding operations; maize shelter to do effortless
job, water heating device, rotary weeders etc. are boon to the rural women working in and out of fields regularly.

This implies that drudgery reduction measures for women should include women's education, employment and training. Men need to be educated about the women's work and their contribution to the family and society. However, when even for same number of working hours, same level of education and skill and experience, women are earning less than the men, then there is need to seriously look into the matter and ensure the implementation of 'Equal Remuneration Act' and any deviation from it should be strictly dealt with. As women are now largely contributing to the earnings of their family and helping to come through the poverty, it is important that their capacities should be enhanced by providing them more decent employment opportunities. NGOs and women welfare organization have to take a lead in influencing the policy makers to take proper social security measures to cover the unorganized sector. Benefits like accident coverage, insurance coverage against life and employment related health issues, incentives for pregnant and lactating women like reduction of working hours for the same wages, medical facilities etc. need to be provided for the enhancement of both economic and health status of women. When any technology is developed, consideration of the opinion, attitude, suggestions of women users in designing the technology is essential. Before introducing any improved tool or equipment to reduce their drudgery, a pilot study needs to be conducted; proper training in use, care and maintenance has to be taught to the user. Local women need to be trained in doing small repairs of the technology so that they get the complete benefits of the improved technology. Assistance of voluntary organization should be sought for taking need based technologies to the target groups and in obtaining feedback regarding the acceptance of the programme and in the identification of factors that influence the transfer of drudgery reducing technologies.
1.11 Current Status of Women in India

The problem of drug use and addiction among women cannot be separated from other aspects of their social existence and conditioning. The social and economic status of women directly impinges on their freedom in real terms. Their status is therefore of great relevance in cases of substance abuse by women themselves, and even more so where women suffer the consequences of such abuse by members of their family.

1.12 Women in India: How Free? How Equal?

India ranks 115 in the Human Development Index of 2001 (UNDP, 2001). The country has made considerable progress since Independence; economic reform and liberalization measures over the 1990s have led to strong economic growth, increased exports and reduced inflation. Overall life expectancy is 62.9 years, and projection for 2000-2005 suggest that life expectancy of males and females will be 63.6 years and 64.9 years respectively (United Nations Population Division, 2000). According to the 2001 Census, overall literacy has increased to 65.38 percent (Census of India, 2001).

1.13 What does this means for the Country’s Women?

A report commissioned by the United Nations Resident Co-ordinator in India (Menon-Sen and Shivakumar, 2001) titled ‘Women in India: How Free? How Equal?’ raise several disturbing issues concerning the current status of women in India. The study’s main findings are outlined below. Data from the Census of India 2001 and the Human Development Report 2001 also corroborate some of the study’s observations.

These Include

➢ Although the absolute number of female has grown 21.79 percent in the last decade, the male female ratio is still lower than it was 100 years ago. In societies where men and women are treated equally, women trend to outlive and outnumber men. Typically, one would expect to
find 103-105 women for every 100 men. The 2001 Census reveals an adverse ratio of 93 women for every 100 men. With the exception of Kerala, every state has fewer women than men. India, in the words of Amartya Sen, has to account for some 25 million ‘missing women’.

➢ The Indian girl child is disadvantaged right from birth. The sex ratio for girl children between the age of 0 and 6 years is 927, strengthening the fear that some girl children are never born or have no opportunity to survive.

➢ Only 54 percent of women are literate as compared to 76 percent of men.

➢ More than 36 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Many of them are women.

➢ There are far fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men.

➢ In some states such as West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, between 63 and 85 percent of married women suffer from anaemia (IIPS, 2000 and ORC Macro 2000).

➢ The average Indian women bears her first child before she is 22 years and has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health.

➢ In 1998-1999, only 48 percent of married women in the reproductive age group used any form of contraception (World Population Monitoring, 2000). This figure is much lower (30 percent) in poorer states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

➢ For many women, abortion is the only method of contraception available.

➢ More than 570 women die per 100,000 births (world Population Monitoring, 2000), 70 percent due to totally avoidable reasons.

➢ Women are under-represented in governance and decision-making positions.

➢ Most women do not have any autonomy in decision making in their personal lives.
➢ In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, less than 50 percent of women have access to money in the household (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000).

➢ Women face violence inside and outside their family, as well as at the workplace.

➢ Police records for the country as a whole show that a women is molested every 26 minutes. A rape occurs every 34 minutes. Every 42 minutes an incident of sexual harassment takes place. A women is kidnapped every 43 minutes. And every 93 minutes, a women is killed.

➢ The impact of drug use on women, both directly and indirectly, needs to be understood within the context of these realities.

From the above facts, it is clearly established that women have been subjected to a lot of discrimination, ill-treatment, sexual exploitation, inequality and low status in the society which calls for immediate protection to the women who have been recently recognized as agents of development. Development sans women development is not at all a real development.

1.14 Need for the Study

Unlike the reviewed studies which are, mostly, macro in nature, the present one is a micro level study confined to a district-Anantapur-one of the most backward district in the country. and it is clear from the review of literature that there were no earlier specific studies like the present one which aims to study the socio-economic conditions of the rural women in Anantapur district. And it is believed that the studies on backward district/regions help the policy making body to suitably design schemes/programmes for their development – an avowed objective of the planning in India. Further, the study files the existing knowledge gap in respect of rural women in Anantapur district.

1.15 Statement of the Problem

Although rural women have been contributing significantly in the agricultural sector, working more number of hours compared to men, yet she
has not been able to claim any thing for her self wholly. She has to get every thing either from her father or husband/male children. She has no freedom whatsoever even to execute a trivial thing like buying either a saree or a blouse of her taste. She, most of the time, sidelined in the decision making process in the family.

It is also widely recognized that apart from managing household chores, and bearing children, rural women, has been facing all hardships in collection of water, wild-vegetables curry leaves, fire wood, fodder and manure. It seems the whole lot of the family burden has been borne by the rural women in the country, which includes the geographical area selected for the present study.

As against this backdrop, the study aims to examine and analyze the socio-economic conditions of the rural women under globalization in the district of Anantapur, which is proverbially known for droughts and famines causing serious scarcity for food and fodder, forcing large scale rural exodus.

1.16 Objectives

The study takes the following as its Objectives:

1. To explain the status of women in general and Rural Women in particular under globalization;
2. To study the trends in the growth rural women during the plan period;
3. To review the programmes/policy for the development of rural women in the country;
4. To examine the aspects of primary education, primary health and infrastructural facilities for the growth and development rural women in the study area;
5. To analyze the socio-economic condition of rural women in the study area; and
6. To suggest measures for the development of rural women in the study area.
1.17 Methodology

Research Design and Source of Data

It is an empirical area specific micro level study conducted in Anantapur district, based on both primary and the secondary data.

The primary data have been collected adopting a pre-tested interview-schedule canvassed among 200 randomly selected rural women spread over the four villages in Kambadur, mandal: Dinnamedi Chennepalli, Karthnaparthy, Chevitivanka Tanda and Jekkireddi Palli, drawing 50 samples from each of the selected village since the entire Revenue Division of Dharmavaram is a homogeneous block. Kambadur, the selected mandal for the study, is a representative mandal.

The secondary data have been collected and processed by A.P. Bureau of Economics and Statistics, year book of A.P, and Anantapur district, record of the office of the DRDA, Anantapur and Five Year Plan documents of India and a.P. These apart, other source like books, magazines, news papers, reports, articles, seminar papers published by Universities and Research Institutions.

Tools of Analysis

The collected mass data would be processed and tabulated and the same would be analyzed employing suitable sample Quantitative Techniques such as percentages, growth rates, ‘t’ and Chi-square values.

1.18 Period of the Study

It is a decadal study covering a period from 2000 to 2010. The year 2009-10 is the survey year of the study.

1.19 Limitation of the Study

Since the present study is the district specific, its findings are strictly confined to the study area and they may not be generalized.
3.20 Plan of the Study

The Thesis has been presented in six chapters: Introduction, need for the study, Objectives, Methodology and Sample selection of the study have been presented in chapter-I; review of literature is presented in chapter-II; the third chapter reviews the programmes/policies initiated by the union and the state governments for the development of rural women in the study area; the fourth chapter analyses the socio-demographic life supporting aspects in the study area; the fifth chapter examines the socio-economic conditions of the rural women in the three sampled villages in Kambadur mandal in the district; and the sixth and last chapter concludes with the summary of the major findings of the study along with suggestions, based on the study, for the development of rural women in the study area.
References


4. Ibid.


