WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment means strengthening the condition of women—socially, politically, economically and legally. It means equal opportunity in all walks of life to develop their potentialities. It also means to enlarge their choices for their own development. Empowerment generally refers to increasing the socio-economic, political, religious status of individuals and communities. Empowerment is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process. Different people have defined the term in different ways. The term empowerment covers a vast category of meanings, interpretations and definitions. The definition and meaning of the term vary from discipline to discipline. According to World Bank (2004), empowerment is the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make and transform those into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment has been defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity to live a dignified human life. According to A.P. J. Abdul Kalam “Empowerment of women is prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with ability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation”.

“Empowerment is a continuous process for realizing the ideals of equality, human liberation and freedom for all” (Vyas, 2008). Women empowerment can be regarded as a process of making women self-reliant, self-sufficient, independent and capable of taking decisions for their own development. Women empowerment also means providing equal opportunity to women in all walks of life-social, economic, political, religious etc. “Women empowerment implies equality of opportunity and equality between genders, ethnic groups, social classes and age groups, strengthening of life chances, collective participation in different spheres of life- cultural, social, political, economic, development process, decision making etc.” (Ibid.) Thus the scope of women empowerment is very vast in nature. It includes all the efforts and initiatives, which aim at all, round development of women. Women empowerment has become an important issue of discussion all over the world. The socio-economic, political and
religious status of women is very backward in our societies, which need special attention. Women are unable to enjoy a dignified life in most of the societies. “The empowerment of women refers to providing the necessary rights and responsibilities to women in order to make them self-reliant.” (Rathod & Kukkudi in Rao: 2011).

Women are highly deprived section in the society. The male dominated society does not treat women as equal participants in any work. “Empowerment is the process of building capacities of women, creating an atmosphere which will enable people to realize their creative potentials. Empowerment gives women, the capacity to influence decision making process, planning, implementation and evaluation.” (Ibid).

The need for women empowerment was felt in India long back by many social thinkers. At the Second Round Table Conference, Mahatma Gandhi had announced that his aim was to establish a political society in which there would be no distinction between people of high and low classes and in which women would enjoy the same rights as men and the teeming millions of India would be ensured dignity and justice-social economic and political.

In an article entitled Empowered women: Empowered nation in Yojana October 2008, President Pratibha Devi Singh Patil emphasized that, “Our full potential as a nation will only be realized when women who constitute about half of our population, can fully realize their potential. As long as that does not happen, half the talent, half the progress, half the development would be lost. We as a nation cannot afford to do that. For a chariot to move forward both wheels have to be strong and if one is weak, then it cannot move. So to move forward the chariot of our country both the wheels-men and women have to be strong and to move ahead jointly” Thus it can be said that without empowering the women, it is not possible to achieve national development.

Gender inequalities still prevail in India in the improvement of capabilities of males and females in different spheres of life. Discrimination against women and gender inequality is visible in the field of educational attainment, provision of health, share in economic opportunities, political participation and sex ratio.

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. A critical aspect
of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing imbalances in different spheres and giving the right to women to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

**Gender equality** means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike. In fact, gender equality cannot be achieved, for the most part, by providing everyone the same services, opportunities and protections, delivered in the same ways. Levelling the playing field requires working directly with girls and women to address historical and present inequalities (affirmative action), as well as efforts to ensure that girls and women, and boys and men, define and benefit from mainstream development efforts (gender mainstreaming).


**SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

Women constitute almost 50% of the world’s population. ‘Women have only 1.10\(^{th}\) of global income.’ (Singh, 2011). The socio-economic condition of the women is very backward as compared to men throughout the world. “Nearly 70% of the women live below poverty line in this world.” (Ibid, p, 246). Socio-economic indicators are reflecting status of women in modern society. Indicators such as education, health, employment, land and legal rights etc are very important to empower any section of society. A person or group as much achieve the high level of these indicators believed to be empowered accordingly. According to Nobel Prize winner Dr. Amartya Sen, “Social opportunities refer to the arrangements that society makes for education, healthcare and so on, which influence the individuals’ substantive freedom to live better. These facilities are important not only for the conduct of private lives (such as living a healthy life and avoiding morbidity and premature mortality), but also for more effective participation in economic and political activities.” (Sen, 2010)

“Gender based discrimination exists in the society which is enforced by social, religious and cultural norms. The very institutions and practices to whom women look for their protection and well-being, such as family, religion, social traditions, culture,
After independence there have a series of conscious initiatives to improve the status of women. A number of affirmative actions have been taken by the government to change the position of the women from inequality to that of equality. Both the Central and state governments have enacted several laws for women empowerment apart from setting up commissions to study the status of the women. The constitution of India provides equal status of equality to women with men. Thus legally, both women and men are equal in India. Women are free to take decisions for their own development. They are free to choose any form of education according to their preference to build their own carrier. But in reality there exist a big difference between theory and practice. The social reality is something different so far as the status of women is considered in the society. Only a few urban women are able to enjoy the fruits of constitutional and legal provisions related to equality, right, liberty and justice. Despite of the constitutional and legal provisions gender bias is still prevalent in most of the societies in our country. “Although equality of status has been guaranteed to the women by the constitution, it is a myth to millions of women as they are the victims of various kinds of violence within house, at work places and in the educational system. They are still the subjects of suppression.”(Agarwal: 2010).

It is very unfortunate that women are not allowed equal access education and economic opportunity, freedom of faith and religion freedom of movement and residence. Right to equality is missing for them. The principle of equal wage for equal wage for equal work does not apply to them. Women are not equally represented in state legislatures, Parliament and other government bodies. Incorporate word also their representation is low.

Gender discrimination is violation of the very rights to life of women and deprives them of the civil, political and economic liberty both within the family and the society. Women’s access to resources including media, health care, and money that they control is greatly circumscribed. In addition, only minorities of women are allowed to go alone to various places outside the home. Since women are over-represented in poorer households and under-represented in wealthier ones, their per
capita resource access is lower than for men. This also means that boys are more likely than girls to be growing up in wealthier households with all the related benefits.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS-

The Constitution of India is one of the most progressive documents so far as the legal rights of the women are concerned. It makes no discrimination on the basis of sex and provides equal rights to all citizens irrespective of sex. The preamble of our Constitution starts by saying that we, the people of India, give to ourselves the Constitution. “The Preamble contains the goal of equality of status and opportunity to all citizens. This particular goal has been incorporated to give equal rights to women and men in terms of status as well as opportunity.” (Pylee, 2002)

Preamble advocates equality of opportunity. As Namita Aggarwal says, “The Preamble to Constitution envisages certain ideals and aspirations of the people of India. One of the golden ideals is the equality of status and of opportunity. This objective has been achieved by and large, by providing an equality clause in the Constitution of India. Thus, the Indian Constitution has ensured equal status to all i.e. not only between men and men, women and women but also between men and women. (Aggarwal, 2002)

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. India has also 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.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens.
in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

The following are some of the provisions made in favour of women, in our constitution:

Article 14 in the Indian Constitution ensures equality in political, economic and social spheres. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in matters of public appointment for all citizens. However, the ratio of women in Politics is far less as compared to men.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc. There are certain places of worship in South India where women are not allowed entry.

Article 15 (3) of the Indian Constitution allows the State to make any special provision for women and children.

Article 39(a) mentions that the State will direct its policies towards securing all citizens, men and women, the right to means of livelihood while Article 39 (c) ensures equal pay for equal work. The daily wages of women labourers in India are lesser than that of male menial workers. Bollywood Actresses also get less money as compared to their male counterparts.

Article 42 directs the State to ensure just and humane working conditions. More often than not, women are exploited by their bosses. The plight of women labourers at construction sites, tea and rubber plantations etc, cannot even be described.

LEGAL PROVISIONS

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to workingwomen.

Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are
characterized as 'Crime against Women'. These are broadly classified under two categories.

The Crimes Identified Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

a. Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)
b. Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373)
c. Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC)
d. Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC)
e. Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)
f. Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)
g. Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age)

The Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL)

Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are:

The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
a. The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
b. The Family Courts Act, 1954
c. The Special Marriage Act, 1954
d. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
e. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
f. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
g. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
h. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
i. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
j. The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976
k. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
l. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
m. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983
n. The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986
o. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
q. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

1. SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

i. National Commission for Women

In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

ii. Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.


The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.
**iv. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001**

The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

The sex ratio (SR) is the number of women per 1,000 men. It is a good indicator of the health and social status of women. The SR for India according to the 2011 Census is 940 females per 1000 males. This represents an improvement over the national figure reported in the 1991 Census (927 females/ 1000 males. Amongst the major Indian States, the only State with a positive sex ratio is Kerala with 1058 females to every 1000 males. In most of the states and union territories the sex ratio is below the national average. The sex ratio (SR) in Assam is adverse, and has been for many decades, certainly throughout the 20th century. Encouragingly, in the last decade of the century (2001 to 2011), the SR has improved. The SR in Assam according to the 2001 Census is 932 females per 1000 males, just below the national SR of 933 females per 1000 males. But it has increased to 954 in 2011. Encouragingly, sex ratio has rising in all districts since 1971 when more than half of the districts had SRs below 900.

**HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

Human Rights of Women-Human rights are those rights, which an individual is entitled to enjoy by virtue of being a human being. The concept of human right is based on the theory that a person is born free and he/she should get the opportunity to live with dignity, which should not be intruded by others. Human rights are very much essential to ensure the dignity of every person as a human being.

Protection of the human rights of women is more important as they constitute one of the vulnerable groups because of the deep-rooted customs. Women do possess human rights and freedoms. The rights of the women are violated by the male dominated society.

As human being women and men have equal social, economic and political rights to their survival in society. According to Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, “human rights are rights that relate not to citizenship, but to what are taken to be the entitlement of
any human being, no matter of which country he or she is a citizen and no matter what the legal system of that country does or does not guarantee.” (Dreze and Sen, 2010)

It means human rights are rights of every human being and it is also against of discrimination at any level. International agencies like United Nations and Human Rights Commission emphasis on equal status and opportunity to men and women. “The United Nations is committed to the principle of equality of men and women, meaning equality in their dignity and worth as human beings as well as equality in their rights, opportunities and responsibilities. In its work for the advancement of women, the entire United Nations system has dedicated itself to ensuring the Universal recognition, in law, of equality of rights between men and women and to exploring ways to give women, in fact, equal opportunities with men to realize their human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (United Nations, 1984).

Although women are cause of men origin, but they have been exploited their rights by men and men dominating society. “Women belonging to all categories are doubly exploited, first for being women, and second for belonging to particular sections of society.” (Biswal, 2006)

According to the International Labor Organization, women work almost double the time in the world than men, and they hold not even one-tenth of the property as against men.” According to the UN resolution 48/104(1993), violence against women is recognized as violation of human rights. India was a party to the women’s convention in 1993. Thus it has accepted the obligation to report to the convention monitoring body- the committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in every four years regarding her efforts to bring laws, policies and practices into compliance with the convention obligations.

There are several international legal instruments which set universally acceptable procedure in relation to human rights and also to eliminate discrimination against women. “Since the foundation of UDHR in 1948, and with the greater awareness of women’s status internationally achieved in the 1970s, there has been an increased collaboration of governments and non-governmental groups to discuss the advancements of women lives. The 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing was one such example. In the Years since Beijing, continued
inaction on the value of women threatens women’s health. Women are still the
majority of world’s poor: they labor in unsafe working conditions with few if any
social services: and they are underrepresented in leadership position where policies
are decided. Even Within their homes, many women are treated as chattel subject to
abuse, and unable to control intimate sexual activity. Educating women is
insufficient to overcome women’s rights abuse without social support and access to
resource that empower women to fulfill their potential as individuals committed to
their communities.”(Levision & Levision, 2003)

STATUS OF WOMEN EDUCATION

Education is another important sector in which difference between male and female
status is visible in India. In India the literacy rate of female is less than males.
Illiteracy is prevalent in women in India since independence. No doubt, the literacy
rate of women in India has increased slowly after independence but still there exist a
wide gap between the literacy rate of male and female. Development of an individual
and the society as a whole depends on education to a great extent. India is the largest
democracy in the world. Women in India are deprived of their real democratic rights.
For centuries, stressed has been given by scholars and experts on education for the
successful working of the democracy. UNESCO, has defined a literate person as, “one
who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his
everyday life.” As quoted in Ram Ahuja: 1997). Education is the basic right of every
citizen. Education is very much crucial for women empowerment. For women
education is more important as they constitute the vulnerable section of the society.
Education can make one capable of taking appropriate decisions. It can broaden the
out-look of the people. Educating a woman is one of the effective means to counter
gender discrimination in the society. Illiteracy among women is a stumbling block on
the way of women empowerment. By increasing literacy rate and education of the
women, the real empowerment of women is possible. “The achievement of universal
primary education has been a key goal of Indian planning since Independence.
However, increasing access to primary schooling still leaves the twin questions of
educational quality and school retention unanswered. Continued economic
development cannot be sustained with a population that has merely completed
primary school; it needs a dependable supply of highly educated and skilled human
capital for which a high level of educational attainment of both women and men is
necessary. However, ensuring a continued supply of skilled human capital to sustain economic growth is only one objective of reducing gender inequalities in educational attainment: the other is that education, particularly higher education of women, is a key enabler of demographic change, family welfare, and better health and nutrition of women and their families. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge and ways of understanding and manipulating the world around them. Education of women has been shown to be associated with lower fertility, infant mortality, and better child health and nutrition.” (NFHS-3)

Education is a vital factor for all sorts of development. By generating new ideas and opportunities, education can play an important role in bringing social change. The National Policy on Education (1986) states that, “Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortion of past, there will be a well-conceived edge for 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, decisions makers and administrators.”

Education has direct relation with employment, political participation, decision-making, social status and culture. Educated women can play a pivotal role in development activities by eradicating poverty. The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly stressed, “Education of boy is education of one person, but education of girl is the education of the entire family”.

Illiteracy leads to unawareness and unscientific attitude and limits the horizon of thinking. Thus it can be said that illiteracy and low level of education is responsible factor for the suffering and underdevelopment of women in the country. No doubt there are certain other factors like attitude of the men toward women, patriarchal social system, and poverty, social evils etc which create barriers on the way of women empowerment but it will not be wrong to say that illiteracy and low level of education among the women provides support to the other barriers. Women still constitute a deprived section of the Indian society. Economic development of women is still in infancy. Women employment is mainly concentrated in unskilled marginal works. The government of India has launched several program and projects for the economic
empowerment of the women but due to lack of education and unawareness women in
general and rural women in particular are unable to get the true benefits.

It is to be noted that women empowerment demands active political participation of
the women.

Education can be one of the major causes for low level of political participation of the
women. Lack of education or low level of education has become a major obstacle in
the path of playing an active role in the functioning of Panchayat Raj institutions. As a
result they provide an ineffective leadership.

Education can also affect the level of involvement in the decision making process.

Thus it can be concluded that education plays the most important role in human
resource development of a country. Education is a basic human right and proper steps
should be taken to provide education to everyone without any discrimination.

In spite of the constitutional provisions and the recommendations of the various
committees and commissions regarding the provision for the same type of education
for women as for men, the gender based discriminations against women, which is the
outcome of domination of men in the society, limits the scope of women education in
the country. According to the census report 778,454,120 persons are literate in the
country. The literacy rate of the country is 74.04. in India 444,203,762 are literate
with a literacy rate of 82.14%.On the other hand only 334,250,358 females are
literate with a low level of literacy rate 65.46%.

Women have always been deprived part in education seekers. Though, their
enrolment in various stages is increasing, they are not only participating but leading in
various school board and higher study results, but till now they are also high in school
droppings, they are less enrolled as compared to their male counterparts and they are
less focused in term of professional studies.

STATUS OF WOMEN HEALTH

‘In terms of Human Development Index (HDI), with an index value of 0.612, India
ranks 134 out of 182 countries of the world in 2007 according to the Human
Development Report 2009.’(Economic survey, 2009-10). If we look at the Gender
Development Index, for India, it will provide a very dissatisfactory figure. In terms of Gender Development Index (GDI), India ranks 114 out of 155 countries. (ibid).

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, emphasis on the need to take initiatives to improve women’s health. Thus it stress on the adoption of “holistic approach to women’s health which includes both nutrition and health services”. Women’s health needs special attention at all stages of the life cycle. Proper health care services should be made available to the women in order to reduce infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are important indicators of human development. The policy document stressed that, “Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care.” It also says that,” Measures will be adopted that take into account the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise informed choices, their vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, TB, and water borne diseases as well as hypertension and cardio-pulmonary diseases. The social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective.” With a view to improve women’s health this policy states that, “In accordance with the commitment of the National Population Policy (2000) to population stabilization, this Policy recognizes the critical need of men and women to have access to safe, effective and affordable methods of family planning of their choice and the need to suitably address the issues of early marriages and spacing of children. Interventions such as spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage and special programmes like BSY should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriages are eliminated”.

Improvement of health demand proper nutrition but in in India women are suffering from malnutrition. In this regard the policy document says that, In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focused attention would be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. This is also important in view of the critical link between the health of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children. Special efforts will be made to tackle the problem of macro and micro nutrient deficiencies
especially amongst pregnant and lactating women as it leads to various diseases and disabilities.”

UNICEF, in its State of World’s Children Report-2009, has made some shocking revelations regarding maternal mortality status in India. According to the report, avoidable complications during child birth results in the death of 78,000 women in India every year. One million children born in India are dying every year even before they become 28 days old. The maternal mortality rate of India stands at 301 per 100,000 births. It is highest in Uttar Pradesh at 517 and lowest in Kerala at 110. Despite an increase in institutional deliveries, 60% of pregnant women still deliver their babies at home. In India more than 2/3 of all maternal deaths occur in a handful of states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Assam. The main medical causes of maternal deaths are:

Haemorrhage: 30% · Anaemia: 19% · Sepsis: 16% · Obstructed labour: 10% · Abortion: 8% · Toxaemia: 8%.

The average female life expectancy today in India is low compared to many countries, but it has shown gradual improvement over the years. In many families, especially rural ones, the girls and women face nutritional discrimination within the family, and are anemic and malnourished. The maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world. Health professionals supervise only 42% of births in the country. Most women deliver with help from women in the family who often lack the skills and resources to save the mother’s life if it is in danger. According to UNDP Human Development Report (1997), 88% of pregnant women (age 15-49) were found to be suffering from anemia.

The average woman in rural areas of India has little or no control over her reproductivity. Women, particularly women in rural areas, do not have access to safe and self-controlled methods of contraception. There is still a need for more gender equality in terms of responsibility for unpaid work at home. However, societal measures in terms of economic incentives and legislation are probably also necessary to support and stimulate women and men to combine family responsibilities with paid work on equal terms in order to improve women’s health and occupational career opportunities.”
After independence the government of India has initiated a number of women welfare schemes. Since independence our country has achieved progress and development in different fields. Women in India have made major gains in terms of decline of maternal mortality and rise in life expectancy increase in female literacy, employment etc., but still big gender gap exist in almost every spheres of life. In terms of health women are still lagging behind men. India is the home of nearly 25% of the world’s maternal deaths. About 1,25,000 women die from pregnancy related causes in India.

Women face high risk of malnutrition and disease at the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase. Household discrimination between the male and female child also leads to such malnutrition problem. A lack of access to clean water, adequate nutrition, safe sanitation, of gender-specific health research and technology, insufficient gender sensitivity in the provision of health information and health care and services, including those related to environmental and occupational health hazards affect women in developing and developed countries. Poverty and the lack of development continue to affect the capacity of many developing countries to provide and expand quality health care (http://wcd.nic.in/bej5plus.htm).

According to a recent report by Save the Children, an international NGO, one-fifths of the world’s newborn deaths occur in India. According to the report, over four lakh new-born die within the first 24 hours every year in India. India also has the highest under-five mortality with over 2 million children dying before their fifth birthday. About 90% of these deaths are preventable. One-third of all malnourished children live in India and 46% of children under-3 years are underweight. A child’s chances of survival vary in different states-the infant mortality rate in Orissa is 96 per 1000 live births in Kerala it is only 14 per 1000. India ranks 171 out of 175 countries in public health spending. (Save the Children Report)

**WOMEN WORKFORCE**

The necessity of women empowerment can be understood from the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru “When women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves.” It has been recognised by many social thinkers that without improving the economic status of women it is not possible to empower women. Women empowerment demands equal economic opportunity for the women. Women
employment is directly related to economic empowerment of women. “Employment is a shield for women to escape from all social evils. Employment gives economic status to women. Economic status opens the door for social status.” (Singh, 2011) Women’s political participation is closely linked with economic participation because women who can provide for themselves economically are in better position to contribute to policy debates. Further, economic wealth provides for education and professional development necessary to succeed in political circle.

After independence different steps were taken to improve the status of women employment. Providing equal status to women has always been one of the main issues of the development planning process. In the first four Five years Plans emphasis was given on organising various welfare activities and women’s education. The fifth and sixth plans put emphasis on overall development of women. The seventh plan emphasized the need for gender equality and empowerment. It recommended the need for generation of more skilled and unskilled jobs for women. For the first time emphasis was placed upon initiating integrated development projects for women covering health, education, nutrition, and creation of employment. The Eight Five Year Plan focused on empowering women especially at the grass root level. It stressed on women’s employment. The Ninth Five Year Plan emphasises on overall development of the women. It adopted the ‘Women’s Component Plan’ and directed both central and state governments to ensure not less than 30% of the funds/benefits are embarked in all the women related sectors. The national Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) was adopted to accelerate the process of women empowerment. The Tenth Plan highlighted the need of empowering women through translating the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001).

The historic report, “Towards Equality” (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974) highlighted the neglect of women’s contribution to economic activities in the unrecognized sector. The Committee also stated that the transition to a modern economy had resulted in the exclusion of an increasing number of women from active participation in the productive process. In 1987, a National Commission for Self Employed Women and Women in Informal Sector was appointed by the Government of India to make a comprehensive study of the working and living conditions of women. The commission submitted its report entitled ‘Shramshakti’ in which it was clearly stressed that women should be recognised as workers.
In India, women’s economic roles are different from that of men. Women participation in overall economic activities is lower than men. Women employment is mainly concentrated in primary sector. Women in rural areas are mainly involved in unskilled and marginal work. “Men and women are not found equally distributed across the various types of work and employment available in the country and there is a male female wage gap.” (Singh, 2011)

Contrary to the common perception, a large percent of women in India work. The National data collection agencies accept the fact that there is a serious underestimation of women's contribution as workers. However, there are far fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men. In India, women comprise about one third of the working force. The number of women workers employed in unorganized sector is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, a majority of them working in the agriculture sector. In 2004-5, there were 29.5 million women workers in the unorganized non-agriculture sector. In urban areas women are engaged in a variety of occupations. In urban areas, over 80 percent are working in the unorganized informal economy where earnings are extremely low, hours of work long, no paid leave, no medical insurance or pension or any other social security benefits. The main reasons for the invisibility of women’s work from statistical data are: (i) cultural constructions of women’s work; (ii) insensitivity of the society to towards women’s work; (iii) difficulties in measuring women’s work in the family, agriculture and unorganized sector (as the line between economic and non-economic activities here is very thin); (iv) women’s socialization in counting their work as insignificant; (v) the dominant social bias to regard men as heads of family and to push home-related, home based activities to secondary category; (vi) insensitivity format of questions and (vii) insensitivity of investigators (especially if they are men) and data-collecting agencies. (Desai & Thakkar, 2001) Much of women’s work never appears in the national statistics because it is regarded as their necessary household works rather than rewarding activities. Thus women participate in a variety of economic activities but most of their works are not counted as their contribution. Women, both in rural and urban areas perform various categories of works – Wage and Salaried employment, self-employment outside the household for profit, self-employment in cultivation and household industry for profit, self-employment in cultivation for own consumption, other subsistence activities in allied sectors such as cultivation fruits and vegetables
gardens; activities related to domestic work such as fetching fuel, fodder, water, forest produce, repair of dwellings, making cow dung cakes, food preservation etc; domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, care of children, the aged and the sick. (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). But most the above-mentioned works of the women are unpaid works.

The National Family Health Survey 2005-06 has concluded that, “Only 43% of women and 87% of men age 15-49 have been employed in the past 12 months. Thus, men are twice as likely as women to be employed. The trend in ever married women’s employment shows only a very small per annum increases from 33% in NFHS-1 to 44% 13 years later in NFHS-3. Most employed women work in agriculture; and only 7% are in professional, technical, or managerial occupations. Further, most employed women are working full time and away from home. Almost one in three employed women are not paid in cash for their work. Although the poorest women are most likely to be employed, controlling for wealth, women with high levels of education are more likely to be employed than those with less education. Nonetheless, the relationship of employment and wealth for women suggests that, for many women, employment is largely a result of economic necessity.”

**LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS**

In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names, and do not get a share of parental property. Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property. In fact, some of the laws discriminate against women, when it comes to land and property rights. The Hindu personal laws of mid-1956s (applied to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains) gave women rights to inheritance. However, the son had an independent share in the ancestral property, while the daughters' shares were based on the share received by their father. Hence, a father could effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but the son will continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, had no residential rights in the ancestral home. After amendment of Hindu laws in 2005, now women have been provided the same status as that of men.
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA:

"Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women...”


The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Examples of Violence against Women throughout the Life Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Type of violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-birth</td>
<td>Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girlhood</td>
<td>Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence and</td>
<td>Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid throwing and date rape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Economically coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with “sugar,daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual, physical and psychological abuse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: “Violence Against Women”, WHO. FRH/WHD/97.8)

59
Violence against women is regarded as one of the cruel acts of the violation of human right. Violence against women has become a very serious issue all over the world. In the recent years women activists and other national and international organizations have launched a global campaign for the elimination of violence against women. Throughout the world violence against women has become a very common phenomenon. Women in India have witnessed various acts of violence through the ages. Violence against women starts right from the time of their birth. The factors responsible for increasing trend of violence against women are: mainly cultural conditioning, perceptual discrepancy regarding the status of women, instructional structure of the society, traditional practices, and preference for male child, dowry system, early marriage, poor education, economic dependence, limited political power, negative perception and to some extent women themselves. The term —violence is used for the extreme forms of aggressive behavior that are likely to cause significant injurious to the victim.

Violence against women (VAW) is a phenomenon that cuts across boundaries of culture, class, education, ethnicity and age.

Male violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon. Although not every woman has experienced it, and many expect not to, fear of violence is an important factor in the lives of most women. It determines what they do, when they do it, where they do it, and with whom. Fear of violence is a cause of women's lack of participation in activities beyond the home, as well as inside it. Within the home, women and girls may be subjected to physical and sexual abuse as punishment or as culturally justified assaults. These acts shape their attitude to life, and their expectations of themselves.

The insecurity outside the household is today the greatest obstacle in the path of women.

Ram Ahuja, in his book entitled Social Problem in India, (1997) has categorized violence against women as:

-Criminal violence-Rape abduction, murder etc

-Domestic violence-dowry deaths, wife battering, sexual abuse, maltreatment of the widows and/or elderly women
- Social violence-forcing the wife/daughter-in-law to go for female feticide, eve teasing, refusing to give a share to women in property, forcing a young widow to commit sati, harassing the daughter in law to bring more dowry etc

Police records show high incidence of crimes against women in India. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that the growth rate of crimes against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2010. Earlier, many cases were not registered with the police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation cases. Official statistics show that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women. According to National Crime Record Bureau, in India one crime against women in every three minutes, one rape in every 29 minutes, one dowry death case in every 77 minutes and one case of cruelty by husband is committed in India. According to the National Crime Record Bureau Report 2005, a total of 1,55,553 cases of violence against women were registered in India including 18,359 cases of rape, 34,175 cases of molestation, 15750 cases of kidnapping, 6787 cases of dowry deaths and 58319 cases of torture.

According to the latest report of the National Crime Record Bureau total 1700 cases of rape reported in Assam in 2011. National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) latest statistics revealed that Assam has become one of most vulnerable places in the country in terms of crime against woman. According to the latest NCRB figures, the rate of crime against women in Assam was the second highest in the country in 2011 with 36.9 per cent. The state of Tripura, which topped the chart in the category, was only a marginal 0.1 percent ahead last year. Assam which is full of natural beauty and world famous for its cultural diversity has become dangerous for women, where even small girls are not safe in their own locality. It is very shameful for a society which worships goddesses and virgin girls. There is a desperate need for Human Rights Activism, which will be free of local interferences.

SEXUAL HARASMENT

Half of the total number of crimes against women reported in 1990 related to molestation and harassment at the workplace. Eve teasing is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. Many activists blame the rising incidents of sexual harassment against women on the influence of "Western culture". In 1987, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed
prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

In 1997, in a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court of India took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The Court also laid down detailed guidelines for prevention and redressed of grievances. The National Commission for Women subsequently elaborated these guidelines into a Code of Conduct for employers.

**DOWRY**

"The custom of giving and receiving dowry is a deep-rooted, and often leads to the neglect of the girl’s education, the impoverishment of her parents, and even the suicide of the girl." (Desai & Thakkar: 2001). Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom’s family along with the giving away of the bride (called Kanyadaan) in Indian marriage. Kanyadaan is an important part of Hindu marital rites. Kanya means daughter, and daan means gift.

Dowry originated in upper caste families as the wedding gift to the bride from her family. The dowry was later given to help with marriage expenses and became a form of insurance in the case that her in-laws mistreated her. Although the dowry was legally prohibited in 1961, it continues to be highly institutionalized. The groom often demands a dowry consisting of a large sum of money, farm animals, furniture, and electronic goods. The practice of dowry abuse is rising in India. The most severe thing in “bride burning” is the burning of those women whose dowries were not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. It is evident that there exist deep-rooted prejudices against women in India. Cultural practices such as the payment of dowry tend to subordinate women in Indian society.

Dowry, the money, gifts or estate that a woman must bring to her husband when they get married remains an important Indian tradition. In 2006 a law against dowry-related harassment was initiated. But dowry demands and killings of newlywed women are still a widespread problem. Dowry is one of the biggest causes of creating distance between men and women. This evil is a part of our society from ancient time. Parents started thinking of arrangement of dowry just after the birth of girl child. In
some part of our society, parents do not want girl child due to only this reason. Gandhiji was also against the system of dowry. According to him, “it was nothing but the sale of girls.” (Joshi, 2002)

Ram Ahuja in his book, ‘Social Problems in India’ has noted the following characteristics of dowry deaths in the country-(i) middle class women suffer a higher rate of victimization than lower class and upper class women;(ii) about 705 victims belong to 21 to 24 years age group, that is they are mature not only physically but socially and emotionally also;(iii) the problem is more an upper cast phenomenon than a lower cast problem;(iv) before an actual murder, several forms of harassment/humiliation are used against the young brides which show the chaotic pattern of social behaviour of the members of the victims family;(v) the most important sociological factor in causation of dowry death is the offender’s environment stress or social tension causes by factors endangerous and exogenous to his family, and important psychological factor is the killer’s authoritarian personality, dominant nature and his personality maladjustment;(vi) no correlation exists between the level of education of the girl and her murder committed for dowry; and (vii) the composition of a family plays a crucial role in bride burning cases.

“The property that a wife or a wife's family gives to her husband upon marriage. Dowries have a long history in Europe, India, Africa, and other parts of the world. In India, the dahej, hunda, or varadakshina as it is called, is paid in cash or kind by the bride's family to the groom's as part of the tradition of giving away the bride. A dowry in some societies is meant to provide the wife with a means of support in case of her husband's death. It may also make it easier for a new husband to fulfill his marital obligations. In the present-day context, however, a dowry is meant to help the newlyweds set up their own home. In contrast to dowry the ‘bride-price’ involves the receipt of presents, in cash or kind, by the bride's family in return for giving away the bride. Hence the bride price has the character of an exchange. While giving or receiving a dowry is decried as a social evil and is now prohibited by law, many still adhere to this practice - in India it has assumed a menacing proportion. Even among the educated middle class, dowry often figures as an essential part of the negotiations in an arranged marriage. During the marriage ceremony the articles of dowry are proudly displayed as a status symbol. Incidences of dowry abuses leading to the
"dowry deaths" are often reported testifying to the adverse repercussion of this social practice." (Encyclopedia of India, Britannica Encyclopedia, CD Rom version, 2009.)

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act, making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. In the 1980s, numerous such cases were reported.

In 1985, the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed. According to these rules, a signed list of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom should be maintained. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of whoever has given the present and his/her relationship to the person. However, such rules are hardly enforced.

Dowry death is considered as one of the cruel acts of violence against women. Every Year almost thousands of dowry death cases are registered in India.

**CHILD MARRIAGE**

Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this day. Historically, young girls would live with their parents till they reached puberty. In the past, the child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaving heads, living in isolation, and shunned by the society. Gandhiji was averse to child marriage. According to him, “it was an evil custom. He told when child marriage was abolished; naturally there would be few, if any, young widows.” (Joshi, 2002). Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860; it is still a common practice.

According to UNICEF’s “State of the World’s Children-2009” report, 47% of India’s women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic Violence can be described as when one adult in a relationship misuses power to control another. It is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. The violence may involve physical abuse, sexual assault and threats. Sometimes it’s more subtle, like making someone feel
worthless, not letting them have any money, or not allowing them to leave the home. Social isolation and emotional abuse can have long-lasting effects as well a physical violence.

**Factors That Perpetuate Domestic Violence**

**Cultural**

- Gender-specific socialization
  - Cultural definitions of appropriate sex roles
  - Expectations of roles within relationships
  - Belief in the inherent superiority of males
  - Values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls
  - Notion of the family as the private sphere and under male control
  - Customs of marriage (bride price/dowry)
  - Acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict

**Economic**

Women’s economic dependence on men

- Limited access to cash and credit
- Discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal lands, and maintenance after divorce or widowhood
- Limited access to employment in formal and informal sectors
- Limited access to education and training for women

**Legal**

Lesser legal status of women either by written law and/or by practice

- Laws regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance
Legal definitions of rape and domestic abuse

Low levels of legal literacy among women

Insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary

**Political**

Under-representation of women in power, politics, the media and in the legal and medical professions

Domestic violence not taken seriously

Notions of family being private and beyond control of the state

Risk of challenge to status quo/religious laws

Limited organization of women as a political force

Limited participation of women in organized political system

(Source: Heise. 1994)

Domestic violence can take many forms and variations and can happen once in a while or all at the same time. Domestic violence can be Psychological Abuse, Social Abuse, Financial Abuse, Physical Assault or Sexual Assault. Violence can be criminal and includes physical assault or injury (hitting, beating, shoving, etc.), sexual abuse (forced sexual activity), or stalking.

The incidents of domestic violence are higher among the lower Socio-Economic Classes (SECs). According to a UN report, two-thirds of the married women in India suffer domestic violence.

Freedom House, an international NGO that publishes an annual report called *Freedom in the world*, states that thousands of Indian women are murdered or forced to commit suicide by their families. These honour killings are an enormous problem in India, in particular in the states of Punjab and Haryana in the Northwest.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 came into force on October 26, 2006. According to Jessy Kurian, Member of National Commission for
Minority Educational institutions, Government of India, “The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is a golden piece of legislation. The Act was passed to provide more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution to the victims of violence that are taking place in family or matters connected with family.” This Act is able to check domestic violence against women but effective implementation is needed.

FIVE -YEAR PLAN AND WOMEN

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

From the first five-year plan, Indian Government has focused on different issues associated with women and child but from the fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been shift in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The Eighth Plan (1992-97), with human development as its major focus, renewed the emphasis on development of women. It sought to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors do not by-pass women. It aimed at implementing special programmes to complement the general development programmes and ensure the flow of benefits to women from development sectors to enable women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) made two significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women. First, ‘Empowerment of Women’ became one of nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan. Second, the plan attempted ‘convergence of existing services’ available in both women-specific and women-related sectors.

The Tenth Plan continued with the major strategy of ‘Empowering Women’ as agents of Social Change and Development. It adopted a sector-specific 3-fold strategy for empowering women viz. Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Gender Justice. Forty eight per cent of the total Indian population is female. ‘Inclusive and integrated economic, social and political empowerment with gender justice’ is how
the Eleventh Plan envisions empowerment of women. In this way, we see that over the years, women’s empowerment has received wide policy support.

**GENDER BUDGETING**

It is the process that entails incorporating a gender perspective at various stages—planning/policy programme formulations, assessment of needs of target groups, allocation of resources, implementation, impact assessment, reprioritization of resources. As Vibhuti Patel says, “Gender audit of budgets provides policy framework, methodology and set of tools to assist governments to integrate a gender perspective into the budget as the main national plan of public expenditure. Gender audit of budgets help governments to decide how policies need to be adjusted and reprioritised for protecting and promoting women’s rights.” Gender budgeting is an outcome of a collaborative effort of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Commonwealth Secretariat and International Development Research Centre, Canada. Now a day’s gender budgeting is practiced by many countries of the world.

Gender Budgeting is a relatively new concept, aims at bringing in gender equality in the allocation of public funds through recognition and identification of its implications for women and girls in a country. The process does not strive to create separate or special budget nor requires more monetary allocation for women. (Nayar, 2006)

Gender Responsive Budget and Gender Mainstreaming are outcomes of Gender Budgeting.

**TOOLS OF GENDER BUDGETING**

- Distinction between Budgeting and Budget
- Budgeting is a process; budget is major outcome

**TOOLS FOR THE PROCESS**

- Macro level Gender budgeting
- Gender sensitive review of public expenditure and policy.
• Preparation of Gender based profile of public expenditure (gender disaggregated data)
• Assessing impact on gender development indices
• Reprioritization of resources
• Micro level Planning
• Policy & programme design to be gender defined
• Requisite allocation of resources in budget
• Participative budgeting at grassroots level
• Beneficiary incidence analysis
• Change in programme design/reprioritization of allocation in budget

NEED FOR GENDER BUDGETING

• Women represent 48 percent of the total population in the country.
• They face disparities in access to and control over services and resources.
• Bulk of Public Expenditure and policy concerns are in “gender neutral” sectors—Power, Defense, Petroleum, Transport etc.
• Implications on women in the above sectors are not recognized or identified.
• Union Budget shows only 4.9% of Public Sector Outlays flow to women. (Yojan, vol 52, October 2008)

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN: A STATUTORY SAFEGUARD FOR WOMEN

“The United Nations Commission on the status of Women in its Twenty-fifth Report had recommended to all member States to establish National Commissions or similar bodies with a mandate to review estimate and recommend measures and priorities to ensure equality between men and women and the full integration of women in all spheres of national life.” (Rao, 2008). Acting on this resolution the Government of India set up a committee on ‘the Status of Women’ in 1971. After three Years, Committee submitted its report. “In order to ensure the implication of various measures, the committee recommended the constitution of statutory autonomous commissions at the Centre and in the States.” (Towards Equality report, 1974)

After a long period of fourteen years Govt. of India has started work in this direction.
National Commission for Women, a statutory body set up in 1992, safeguards the rights and interests of women. The Commission came into being by an Act of Parliament in 1990 and it has been functioning since 1993. It continues to pursue its mandated role and activities; viz. safeguarding women’s rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities, sexual harassment of women at work place; conducting Parivarik/ Mahila Lok Adalats, legal awareness programmes/camps; review of both women-specific and women-related legislations; investigate into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc. NCW, since its inception, investigated several complaints, wherein dowry deaths and dowry harassments accounted for the maximum number. Open Adalats (public hearing) is the most innovative and informal style adopted by the Commission to hear the individual grievances. Out of 41 legislations having direct bearing on women, the commission reviewed and suggested remedial legislative measures in 32 Acts and forwarded the same to the government for necessary action, besides drafting a Bill on Sexual Harassment at the Work Places and a Bill on SAARC Regional Convention for Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children. ‘In 2004, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, made a very remarkable statement that no country in the world has achieved total equality between the sexes both in law and in practice, even after 25 years of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.’ (Agarwal: 2010).
An Overview of Women Struggle for their Political Right.

1611 Women received voting right in Massachusetts state in United States of America.
1780 Voting right of women withdrawn from the state of USA.
1978 The Francisy political leader Kaun Saint demanded opportunities of women to involve in politics.
1840 Demand was raised in USA to establish Equal Right Association and to give equal rights to the Negro women.
1857 Women of the sewing industries and cloth industries in New York (USA) called strike demanding equal salary of female workers.
1859 Women freedom movement started in Russia.
1869 National Women Voting Association was established in USA.
1882 Women’s Right Association was established in France.
1893 Women received voting right for the first time in New Zealand.
1904 The International Women’s Right Alliance was established in America.
1906 Women received voting right for the first time in Finland.
1908 Women’s Freedom League was established in Britain.
1911 First Women’s freedom movement was started in Japan.
1912 The conference of Women’s Association was held in China which demanded voting right for women.
1913 Women received voting right for the first time in Norway.
1913 Women’s Day was celebrated in Austria (first time).
1913 Women’s Day was celebrated in Switzerland (first time).
1913 Women’s Day was celebrated in Denmark (first time).
1936 Women received voting right for the first time in France.
1945 Women received voting right for the first time in Italy.
1951 The International Labor Organization passed the law equal wage for equal work for the male and female workers.
1957 The General Assembly passed the law of Women’s Political right.
1959 The Equality between male and female was passed in Tunisia.
1968 The first lady prime minister of the world Mrs. Bhandara Nayake was elected in Sri Lanka.
1975 The right to join the services (without permission of her husband) was given.
to the women in Iran.

1975 Conferences of International Women Association were celebrated in the world.

1985 The first Conferences of International Women Association were celebrated in Copenhagen.

1993 The second Conferences of International Women Association was held in Nairobi.

1993 Women of Russia (a political movement) were started in Russia and 21 members of this movement were elected in the parliamentary election.

1995 Women were selected in infantry, Navy and air forces in India.

1997 The third Conference of International Women Association was held in China.

For the first time women judge was appointed in Iran.


WOMEN & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

Participation is a base of development and empowerment. "Participation is concerned with the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulate institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control." (Pearse and Steafel, 1979)

Political participation of women is associated with involvement of women in decision-making process at mainstream politics as well as grassroots politics. An important area where women have been inadequately represented is in the political sphere. Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India guarantee political equality, equal right to participate in political activities and right to vote respectively. While the latter has been accessed, exercised and enjoyed by a large number of women, the former i.e., right to equal political participation is still a distant dream. Lack of space for participation in political bodies has not only resulted in their presence in inadequate numbers in these decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making.
### Women’s representation in Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of LS Elections</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>No. of women MPs</th>
<th>Percentage of women MPs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Centre for Study in Developing Society, CSDS
ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Media interventions can alter gender norms and promote women’s empowerment.

The mass media play a very vital role in disseminating information, educating and entertaining people. Mass media also play an important role in national development. In the process of women empowerment mass media can play a very pivotal role.

“Communication is extremely important for women’s development and mass media play a significant role. It is to be noted that growth of women’s education and their entry into employment has contributed to the growth of media. In all spheres of life, whether for controlling population growth, spread of literacy or improving quality of life for vast masses, women have a crucial role to play. However, women can be expected to play this role when they become conscious of their strength and are not deliberately marginalized by male domination. In this context, media has an important role to play – to create awakening in women to achieve their potential as the prime movers of change in society. In today’s world, print and electronic media play a vital role in effectively conveying a message that needs to be conveyed.”

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. The role of media has become very important in shaping present days society. It educates people about the current issues and influences the public opinion. The common people rely on media to know about happenings in the society. Mass media is often considered as the 4th pillar of the society and democratic medium of information. Media has the power to pressurize and criticize the drawbacks of democracy. It is instrumental in bringing about unity among the masses and is backbone of the nation. The reach of media to common people has increased and undoubtedly media has attained the role of a very powerful organ in virtually all spheres of life. “The media are important social institutions and are crucial presenters of culture, politics and social life, shaping as well; as reflecting how these are formed and expressed. Media ‘Discourse’ is important both for what it reveals about a society and for what it contribute to the character of the society (Bell, 1995)
Nowadays media is flickering from its actual role and giving entertaining or biased information, which makes difficulties for development of the society. The very nature of the mass media is changing in this rapid changing world under the wave of globalization. In the present era of globalization and liberalization, media has become more responsive towards global market and commercial gains.

The second press commission (1987:30) observes that, “the reporting of non-official initiatives in rural development, educational reforms, leprosy eradication and so on is less extensive than the in-depth reporting of the implementation of official development programmes. It is unfortunate that our newspapers become aware of such non-official activities only after they have been honored by Jamamalal Bajaj Foundation or Magsaysay award.’

The role of Mass media in development activity is very significant as implied in the dominant paradigm of development. It is instrumental in defining what we think and our respective place in society. It is again vital to the interpretation and evaluation of the issues.

The diffusion of innovations research established the importance of communication in the modernization process at the local level. In the dominant paradigm, communication was visualized as the important link through which exogenous ideas entered the local communities.

Lerner (1958) in “The Passing of the Traditional Society” points out that the mass media was both index and agent of modernization. In Lerner's model, there was a close reciprocal relationship between literacy and mass media exposure. Accordingly, the literate developed the media, which in turn accelerated the spread of literacy.

S.C.Dube (1958) studied the importance of communication in community development program in India. Wilbur Schramm (1964) emphasized on the role of communication in the process of social change by saying that the development of mass media is one of the requisites for and signs of a modernising society. He noticed changes in social, cultural, religious and personal attitudes, which subsequently have helped change and shape a society completely different.

Media has completely revolutionised the style of people. Some well-known studies conducted by well known Mass Communication scholars such as Rao (1965), Damle
(1956) and several others. These researches establish that media has immensely aided and assisted the rate and score of development.

Lakshamana Rao (1966) an eminent scholar has tried to study the role that communication plays in the economic, social and political development of a community. His monographic study of two Indian villages is based on anthropological method where he has not administered any systematic method for collecting data except depending on observation, said that Kothuru (a new village) and Pathuru (an old village)- two South Indian villages were found contrasting stages of development. One was becoming industrialized, whereas the other still clung to the agrarian economy. The findings reveal the impact of communication on economic, social and political spheres of community. Communication helps a person to find alternative ways of making a living, helps him to raise a family\'s social and economic status, creates demand for goods, motivates local initiative to meet the rising demands, raises the literacy rate, shifts the influence from the age old and traditional status to knowledge and ability helps him in the process of power change from heredity to achievement, motivates the traditional leaders to defend their power by raising their information level, increases awareness about government plans and programmes and helps the community or the nation to achieve power through unity. Thus communication in any mode is vitally important not only for development but also for a rapid growth along with the usage of science and technology.

Malhan (1995) emphasized that the communication media (including the big and small, modern and traditional, person-to-person and extension) are necessary to inform, educate and persuade people and thus provide effective communication support to democracy and development plans.

The predominant role of communication can be broadly seen in two positions. Firstly, to transfer technological innovations from development agencies to the clients, secondly, to create an appetite for change through raising a climate for modernization among members of public.

In the cases of developed and developing countries like India, media can play an instrumental role in generating the awareness and shaping the public opinion.

It has been found that mass media can be an effective instrument in promoting
women’s rights. Media can influence the society by injecting new ideas. A number of experiments have shown that media can reduce domestic violence against women.

"The communication media produce messages and symbols which create or structure prevailing images of social reality, thus affecting the process of social change." (UNESCO, 1979)

Media has also been a catalyst for organizing women into active groups that can lobby for their issues in government as well as act as pressure groups vis-à-vis other sectors such as business.

In order to achieve women empowerment by increasing their participation in the Political process-33% seats have been reserved for the women in Panchayats and the municipalities by making an amendment to the constitutional in the year 1992. A number of laws have been made by the parliament to eliminate all sorts of discriminations and violence against women. Despite of these laws women are still vulnerable in our society. Women are still discriminated in our Society because it has been deeply rooted in the value systems, which are very difficult to change only by making laws. It requires collaborative and collective efforts on the parts of Government, Media, N.G.O’s and others Social organization.

Media play an effective role in creating public opinion on women empowerment issues. It can mobilize public opinion on different aspects of women’s empowerment. Media can be very affective in generating public opinion by disseminating the issues of gender inequality, and role of women in development process etc. Lack of awareness and illiteracy are widely prevalent among the women. It has pushed them to the injustices and makes them incapable to challenge degrading practice and discriminatory norms of the society. Media can play its role in providing non formal education to the poor girl child and adult women In India the women illiterate is very high Female literacy is significantly lower than male literacy in India. Government has taken a number of initiatives to eradicate women illiterate but still, due to the presence of orthodox attitude the literacy rate is low among the female in our country. Language press is very much popular in the rural areas. It can motivate women to come forward to play active role in the society. It has the power to influence the attitude of the people, which should be utilized to create positive attitude toward women.
It can play an effective role in spreading human right literature among the people. In the Protection of women right the United Nation’s Committee on elimination of discrimination against women has emphasized the role of mass media.

Health care is very much related to women empowerment. It is very necessary to spread health care awareness among the rural masses especially among the women. Media has to play leading role in these regards. Despite of some major initiatives of the government in the health sector in general and women healthcare in particular still majority of women in the rural areas are suffering from poor health and malnutrition because of ignorance and lack of awareness. Majority of Women in the rural areas are under the clutches of superstitious belief, and orthodox temper, which creates psychological and cultural barriers on the path of their empowerment. Media can break these orthodox attitudes by infusing new thoughts on scientific line.

In Indian Society is surrounded by social evils. In our Society a number of social evils are existing and majority of them are directly are indirectly violating the rights and liberty of the women social evils like dowry system, witch hunting child marriage etc. are spoiling our society like cancer. It will not be wrong to call them social diseases as these are deeply rooted in our societal values and mentality. Media can be very effective in fighting against these social evils.

It can provide legal assistance to the victims. It can collect data from different Government sources on present socio economic conditions of the women and can disseminate them to the people. It can through the issue of women empowerment to public domain.

Media have a vital role to play in the promotion of women empowerment. Media can be an effective agent of women empowerment. The truth is that the promotion of women empowerment cannot gather momentum without the fullest cooperation of the Media.
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