Chapter - I
Introduction

The concept of gender equality is recognized globally as key element to achieve progress in all areas. Gender equality concerns each and every member of the society and forms the very basis of a just society. Human rights issues, which affect women in particular, play a vital role in maintaining the peace and prosperity of a just society.

Today as we stand at the beginning of the 21st century, we are still unable to boast of a society where there is total gender equality. Until recently, the question of gender equality was a topic of theoretical discussion. Things are changing but rather slowly.

At the international level, prohibition against sex discrimination was first articulated in the United Nations Charter of 1945 and later reiterated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Since then, virtually all human rights instruments have reinforced and extended protections against discrimination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted in 1966 guarantees equal protection of the law to both sexes. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also adopted in 1966 promises women equality of status. The Fourth World Conference of Women, held at Beijing in 1994 brought us further forward by reaffirming gender equality as a fundamental pre-requisite for social justice.

Perhaps the most important conceptual advance in the international law of women’s rights is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1981), which provides that women be given rights equal to those of men on equal terms. The Preamble of CEDAW maintains that “the full and complete development of a country...
welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields”.

The Heads of States and governments who gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in September 2000, at the dawn of a new millennium adopted a historic Declaration. They recognized that, in addition to their separate responsibilities to their individual societies, they have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. They recognized that they had a duty to the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable. The Declaration affirmed their respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and respect for equal rights of all without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.

The Millennium Declaration asserted that no effort would be spared “to free fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected”. They affirmed their commitment to the right to development, a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want.

Specific targets have been laid down under the categories of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction in child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating diseases, environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development. All the 189 United Nations Member States have pledged to reach the above goals by the year 2015.

In fact, all the goals have a close linkage to one another and for realization of the most of them, women empowerment is the key. For
instance, the first goal on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger refers to the need for reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day, and who suffer from hunger. Even among the poor, women constitute the most vulnerable groups. They share a disproportionate burden of poverty. According to UNDPs Human Development report for 1995, women account for 70% of the world's poor. This phenomenon, which is referred to as the feminization of poverty, calls for targeted response from governments and others. According to a study published by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative on 'Human Rights and Poverty Eradication' (2001), “two-thirds of illiterate people are women. Life expectancy in Asia is shorter for women than men. 70% of the children out of school are girls; malnutrition and mortality rates are much higher among girls than boys.” In view of this, if a real dent is to be made in the fight against poverty and hunger, the targeted efforts, keeping the gender dimension and gender empowerment in view can bear fruit.

The Constitution of India guarantees equal justice on social, economic and political grounds to all its citizens. In the matter of equality Article 14 confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc. Article 15(3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favor of women. Similarly, in the matter of public appointments Article 16 provides equal opportunities for all the citizens. Article 39(a) lays down that the State shall direct its policy towards securing the rights to all citizens, men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood, while Article 39(c) ensures equal pay for equal work. Article 42 directs the States to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity
relief. Above all, the Constitution imposes fundamental duty on every citizen through Article 51A(e) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women. The question, however, is whether the women have been able to reap the benefits provided for them under the Constitution of India. The answer unfortunately is not encouraging. There is a long way to go to achieve the goals enshrined in the constitution.

In tune with various provisions of the Constitution, the State has enacted many women-specific and women-related legislation to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of Sati, etc. Notwithstanding the enactment of the laws relating to dowry, rape, violence against women, the factual position is rather distressing. What is true at the national level is also a cause of concern at the global level.

Consider the following statistics:

- Two-thirds of world's adult illiterates are women, who number about half-a-billion adult women.
- 70% of the world's poor are women.

Even at the national level, there are several areas of deep concern

- Majority of women do not have liberty to take their own decision about age at marriage, mate selection, size of family
- Women are not encouraged to earn their own livelihood and are discriminated to take part in every economic activities
- Women are not encouraged to represent themselves in political domain
- High maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate are continued
- High gender gap in literacy at all levels
High rate of dropouts of girl students

Increasing incidents of crime against women

Violence against women in the domestic as well as the public spheres which is a direct violation of their individual right to personal security.

The year 2001 was observed as Women Empowerment Year. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was evolved in 2001. It recognizes that the underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure on informal and formal norms, and practices. Consequently, the access of the rights among the women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other backward Classes and minorities, rural women and women working in the informal, unorganized sector- to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded. The Policy underlines the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. The economic empowerment of women through poverty eradication, provision of micro-credit, strategies to save them from the negative impact of globalization etc was stressed. Besides economic empowerment, social empowerment of women through education, health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, housing shelter, environment, science and technology and focus on women in difficult circumstances were highlighted. There is a need for targeted efforts to ensure the rights to poor women, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single family women in difficult circumstances, women heading households women displaced from
employment, migrants women, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

With a view to convert the equality of women from de jure to de facto, firstly, educating the female would play an important role, secondly the economic independence and providing employment opportunity to women will also play an important role in their emancipation. Along with economic independence, equal emphasis must also be laid on the total development of women – creating awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities—the recognition of their vital role and the work they do at home. If necessary, social system or society must respond and change its attitudes.

Studies have shown that countrywide prevalence of moderate to severe anemia among pregnant women is around 47% and that 30% of Infant mortality in India is due to maternal anemia. The maternal mortality rate in India at about 410 per 100,000 births is more than 50 times higher than the rates that exists in the developed countries. This situation calls for urgent remedial steps. The National Human Rights Commission made elaborate recommendations in this regard. Women empowerment could contribute to bring down the maternal mortality as laid down in the Millennium Development Goals.

Recognizing the crucial linkages between Population Policy, development and human rights, the National Human Rights Commission, organized a two-day colloquium at New Delhi in January 2003, in association with the Department of Family Welfare and UNFPA. The Declaration adopted at the end of the colloquium noted with concern that population policies framed by some of the State Governments reflect in certain respects a
coercive approach through the use of incentives and disincentives, which in some cases is a clear violation of human rights. This is not consistent with the spirit of the National Population Policy. The violation of human rights affects particularly the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society, including women. The Declaration emphasized that a situation where the status of women is low and son preference is prevalent, coercive measures further undermine the status of women and results in harmful practices such as female foeticide and infanticide. The Declaration affirmed that reproductive rights couldn’t be seen in isolation, as they are intrinsic to women’s empowerment and empowerment of marginalized sections of society. Therefore, giving of priority to health, education and livelihood of women is essential for exercising these rights, as also for reduction in fertility rates and stabilization of population. The Declaration acknowledged that reproductive rights set on the foundation of dignity and integrity of an individual encompass several aspects such as:

❖ The right to informed decision-making, free from fear of discrimination
❖ The right to regular accessible, affordable, good quality and reliable health care:
❖ The right to medical assistance and counseling for the choice of birth control methods appropriate for the individual couple;
❖ The rights to sexual and reproductive security free from gender-based violence.

From above facts, it is realized that the actual development cannot take roots if it bypasses women who represent half of the total population. India has directed its efforts towards removing various gender biases in order to
accord women equal status by conferring equal rights. We must make sure that women have been provided with all the skills, services and self-confidence which they need for their protection.

The above facts show that, women have more rights to access to achieve their own empowerment. But the questions are: (I) Are our women aware of all these rights? (II) Do they actually access these rights? After having laid down the Constitution, India shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex. The Constitution allows the State to make special provisions for women. Nevertheless women constitute the larger vulnerable section in India with a variety of social, economic and political obstacles which prevent them from exercising their legal and conventional rights. Particularly, the rights of deciding age at marriage and selecting one’s life mate, are disapproved, divorce is looked down upon, widow remarriage is socially prohibited, there are innumerable cases of ill-treatment of women by their husbands and in-laws. Women are forbidden to take decisions in reproductive aspects like, decision taking on her health care, on when to have a child and what should be the size of family. Accessing of educational right is not supported. Economic rights like gaining employment, spending their own earning and inheritance of paternal property are not encouraged. And political rights are also denied under different pretexts. Thus the denial of the rights and the sufferings of women are mainly due to their own unawareness of accessing their rights, as a result, there is no change in the deep rooted traditional and social attitudes towards women. From this point of view, the present research is under taken to study the level of awareness of accessing human rights among the women and its impact on their empowerment.
Status of Women

The status of women in a particular society reflects the value system of that society. This value system is the very pulsation of the vitality of that society. The “history” shows that most of the societies have been male-dominated societies. The women's role in the society from the micro level to the macro level, from family to the wider social, economic, political and cultural system has been determined by men in their own favour. So men are in the center of the circumference of the social activities. The women have been regarded no doubt as the essential components of the society. But their positions and terms are decided by men in the form social norms, values responsibilities an innumerable restrictions and taboo that are imposed on them.

Mr. Desai (1987) in his study on “Indian women” mentioned that the position of women in India has undergone many changes down the ages. In the ancient period, women enjoyed equal rights with men in society and were given preferential treatment. In the Vedas, there are ample evidences of women scholars excelling in various intellectual activities.

Everett Jana Matson (1981:36.43) has mentioned five classified factors that are inductive for low status of Indian women at the all the stages of family and society, and he also identified the female’s seclusion in our cultural hierarchy. They are namely Hindu religion, Caste system, Joint family system, Islamic rule and British colonialism. The values of Hinduism uphold that males are superior to females and those males have to play a role of provider and females are subordinate. And men were to look after economic and political activities whereas females were confined to motherhood and household activities. (1) Hindu religious scriptures have described a dependent
status for women throughout her span of life. (2) Caste system also imposed many restrictions on the involvement of women in social and public affairs. On the one hand, it prescribed an early marriage for girls; and on the other it prohibited widow remarriage, and prescribed the sati system (sacrifice of life). (3) The patriarchal joint family system curbed women's freedom and contributed to their low status in the family by assigning status based on age, sex and kinship. (4) The status of women further deteriorated during the Moghal period. Under the socio-political impact of the Islamic rule, the Hindus adopted the Muslim custom of female seclusion that is veil (purdha system) which implied a complementary division of labour by gender; child marriages became very common to protect the girls from the evil eyes of rulers and landlords. (5) Though the British emperors initially decided not to interfere with the Hindu social laws, but in the latter part of the nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth century, when some social reformers talked of reforms for women and their efforts provided incentives to women's liberalization movements, the British government agreed to abolish/change social customs through the legislative measures.

From the historical background it is understood that, women in the first place, did not have any space in society. It is the direct outcome of patriarchy. There is no doubt that patriarchy was determinant of every aspect of women's life. Second, in family, women never wield the power of decision making. Third, women were not enlightened with the lamp of education. Even with the lapse of sixty one years of Independence Indian women seldom get their due share in any field.
Present situation
Sex ratio

One of the strong indicators of women's status in a society gets reflected in sex ratio. This is shown in the table below.

Table 1.1
Sex ratio of total population and child population in the Age group 0-6; 1961-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0-6 per 1000 male children</th>
<th>Overall per 1000 males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1961,71,81,91,2001

Table 1.1 shows the decline in the ratio of females per 1,000 males. The sex ratio declined from 934 in 1981 to 927 in 1991. However, the overall trend of sex ratio in the country since 1961 also shows a trend towards a continuous decline in the sex ratio, barring a marginal improvement in 1981. In 2001, there is a slight improvement in the proportion of females to 933.

There is no doubt that the females are biologically stronger than the males, they live longer than males. But in India, though birth of females is more, the loss of more females is due to insufficient attention and proper care after their birth. A relatively higher proportion of death among women during the reproductive age between 13-19 years, on account of early marriage. As a consequence females per 1,000 males were only 933 at the time of 2001 census in India.
Literacy

Literacy is crucial for all-round development of women. Unfortunately 54 percent of women in the country are still illiterate. It is rightly said that by educating a woman the society is educating not only one female but also the whole family and whole nation. Still, the gender discrimination in literacy is a reality. Male-female gap in literacy is evidenced in Table 1.2

Table 1.2
Literacy rates in India (1951-2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male-Female gap in literacy rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>16.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.30</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>15.35</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>23.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.57</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
<td>26.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>24.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64.84</td>
<td>75.85</td>
<td>54.16</td>
<td>21.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India

Violence

Women are constant victims of various kinds of violence. Violence has different forms: physical and mental. These different forms of violence on women are the indicative of their low status resulted in violation of the fundamental rights

The following statistics show the extent of violence against women

- One woman is the victim of torture every 20 minutes
- One molestation for every 22 minutes
- One kidnapping in every 40 minutes
- One rape in every 43 minutes
➤ One sexual harassment in every 15 minutes
➤ One convicted with prostitution in every 70 minutes
➤ Growth rate of crimes against women is higher than that of population growth.

Health

Health is the most vital aspect of women empowerment. Women's health in a typical family has been a matter of least concern. Men should realize that women's health is just like insurance for the entire family. Women's health remains functional in respect of childbearing and child rearing. Inspite of pivotal role-played by woman in a family, there has been persisting discrimination between male and female health care systems. The following points clearly indicate the status of women's health in India

- Life expectancy is around 63 years
- Wide state wise differentials ranging between 75 years in Kerala and 57 years in M.P & Bihar
- Health system not 'women friendly' that means the ratio of lady medical officer is very less. And rural women have to walk miles together to avail the necessary health treatment
- Culturally suffer in silence- 90% go to doctor only when situation out of control
- 50% of all married women suffer from anaemia
- inadequate nutrition
- lack of care during pregnancy
- Almost 300 Indian women die every day during child birth (maximum number in UP)
Work participation

According to recent World Bank Reports, "India invests far less on its women workers than on its men workers with women receiving less health care, less education and fewer productive assets. Women contribute heavily to the Indian economy, forming one third of the total labour force in India, one third of rural families are headed by women, and women's economic productivity is for the 60 million Indian households below the poverty line". The findings of this report speak volumes for the status of women in India.

Table 1.3
Work Participation of Women in India (1971-1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>T/R/U</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>52.75</td>
<td>34.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>53.78</td>
<td>35.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>48.88</td>
<td>29.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>52.62</td>
<td>36.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>23.06</td>
<td>53.77</td>
<td>38.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>49.06</td>
<td>29.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>51.61</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>52.58</td>
<td>40.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>48.92</td>
<td>30.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the work participation of women in India. It shows that under the given working condition, women work force could be tapped. Wretched condition of women workers in terms of discriminatory wages, conditions of service and such others can easily be seen in society. Action towards equality in these respects needs to be taken seriously.

Hence women in India suffer from number of problems and are subjected to exploitation. In order to over come from those problems, the
foremost important step is to make them aware of their rights. The access of their rights would bring about a basic change in society through women empowerment.

Need for Empowerment of Women

Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known. The National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 has made a free, frank and objective analysis of the impact of developmental plans and programmes on Indian women. Inspite of this there is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors- economic, social, political, educational, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life.

Women's empowerment includes both a personal strengthening i.e. enhancement of life chances, and collective participation to achieve equality of opportunity for different ethnic groups and social classes. It enhances human potential at individual and social levels of expressions. Empowerment is an essential starting point and a continuing process for realizing the ideals of human liberation and freedom for all.

Women, especially rural women, are also the ones whose survival is most threatened by ecologically disastrous development. Women are the poorest, the most vulnerable. When forests, or lands or rivers, or wells die, these women mourn the most because they are the most affected. Because women only know the pains of creation, they hate distraction most. This is why in struggles to save forest; struggles against pollution, women are in the forefront. For all these reasons, women have to be at the center of sustainable development. Women are more likely to insist that basic needs be satisfied, that killing be stopped.
The United Nation's Report 1991, about “Challenges to the Year 2000” says that the empowerment of women has multiple benefits not only for the environment but also for humanity. Ensuring sustainable development requires women's empowerment and their full, equal and beneficial involvement in decision-making process related to sustainable development. It also requires their full participation as planners, managers, scientists and technical advisers in all environment and development field.

During the Earth Summit held in Rio (3-14 June 1992) Women's Treaty for NGO's seeking a just and healthy planet, "pledged their commitment to the empowerment of women; which is the central and powerful force in the search for a safe environment, economic and social justice, adequate reallocation of resources for the survival of all species and the common goal of a healthy planet in which future generation can flourish". According to the treaty, for raising the social, economic, political and health status of women, there is a need for policies and actions to assure them of equal access to education, information, fair wages, land, safe working conditions, inheritance rights, credit and appropriate technology, environmental friendly consumer products and health care. There should not be any deprivation of women of their reproductive freedom, the knowledge required to exercise that freedom, the provision of comprehensive reproductive health care and family planning, including the right to parental care, safe and legal voluntary contraceptives and abortions, sex education and information.

As women account for more than half of the world's illiterate population achieving literacy could be one of the first strategies to empowering women to participate more equally in society and free themselves from economic exploitation and oppression. The empowerment of women and the improvement of their status particularly, in respect of education, health
and economic opportunities is a very important end in itself. This also enhances their decision-making capacity in vital areas, especially in the area of reproduction. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and of giving them knowledge skills and self confidence to make them full partners in the development process.

Concept of Human Rights

As a member of society every human being is bestowed with rights that facilitates him/her to survive as well as to make his/her life better. "Human rights are, concerned with dignity of the individual- the level of self esteem that secures identity and promotes human into a systematic life". As such their main implications and characteristic features may be enumerated as under.

Human rights are like moral rights and, as such, the element of their enforcement lies in the faculty of man's conscience. They cover legal rights protected by the law of the state; they also cover fundamental rights incorporated into the basic law of the land and thereby given special treatment in respect of their amendment and judicial enforcement.

An appeal to the cases of human rights covers the world as a whole and as such it sanctions the use of persuasion as well as force by foreign powers to intervene in the domestic affairs of a State where human rights are not properly honored. In this way, the present case of human rights involves the case of restraints on the way ward sovereignty of a state.

Human rights are also like other rights, that may also be restricted in the interest of public peace, social decency, political security and so on.

Every nation has its own cultural mores in the light which reasonable restrictions are being put on the exercise and enjoyment of such rights.
So far as definition of human rights is concerned there is no universally accepted conception. Infact it is varies from time to time, place to place, people to people. Even within the same society people’s perceptions vary from one group to another.

Real meaning of human rights keeps evolving with the passage of time and under constantly shifting social and economic conditions. And despite this “the foundational norm governing the concept of human rights is the respect for human personality and its absolute worth regardless of colour, race, sex, religion or other considerations. These are essential for the adequate development of the human personality and for human happiness. In simple, human rights may be said to be those fundamental rights to which every man or woman inhabiting in any part of the world should be deemed entitled merely by virtue of having been born a human being. Generally speaking human rights are those protection, which are socially given to every individual, for any oppression or exploitation.

What are Human Rights?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948, lead off with the following statement.

(Whereas) recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights to all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

(Whereas) the people of the United Nations have in the charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger
freedom. Generally speaking "Human Rights are those Basic rights, which every one inherits the moment one is conceived in the mother's womb".

Another definition of human rights is those 'basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity'. To violate some one's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he was not a human being. To advocate human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected.

Essentially

"Human rights are natural rights that human being possess simply by virtue of being human".

"Human rights are held by all persons equally and universally".

"Human rights are irrevocable; they cannot be revoked or suspended for political expediency".

"Human rights are inalienable; one cannot lose these rights any more than one can cease to be a human being".

"Human rights are indivisible; one cannot be denied any right because it is less important or non-essential".

"Human rights are interdependent; all human rights are part of a complementary framework. For example, the ability to participate in government is directly affected by the right to express, to get an education and even to obtain the necessities of life.

In claiming these human rights, one accepts the responsibility of not infringing on the rights of others and to support those rights are abused or denied.
Development of Human Right Concept

The roots for the protection of human rights are traced as far back as in the Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittis laws and in the Vedic Dharma of Hindu. Socrates stands out as a beacon light in the history of Greek civilization, getting the youth into his orbit of logical thinking and search for truth championing the cause of freedom of thought and expression. And other Greek thinkers like Plato, Aristotle and Herodotus and Roman philosophers also depict for the protection of human rights through religious foundation. The city of Greece gave an equal freedom of speech, equality before law, right to vote, right to be elected to public office, right to trade and the right of access to justice to their citizens.

In the past people expected their rulers to govern wisely and for the common good. This expectation was based on divine commandment (fear of God), natural law, and tradition or contingent political arrangements. The people had no rights against unjust rulers, for they did not have a claim or right to be ruled justly. An unjust ruler could not be tamed. The greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist kalidas, Prophet Mohammed Paigamber, Great social reformist Basaveshwara and communist proponent Karl Marx were shining examples in the realm of right to freedom of thought and expression. In the history of India's freedom movement, the most outstanding patriot Balagangadhar Tilak, roared in the Trail Court “Swaraj is my birth right” which even today inspires us all. The evolution of human rights changed this situation as people could now look for justice when their rights were violated. But this is enforcing differently in different parts of the world.

In the West, the concept of human rights evolved in the 17th century with John Lock’s book ‘The Second Treatise of Government’ that presented a
theory of natural rights that equal individuals have natural rights to their lives, liberties and estates. The government plays an important role in protecting natural rights, Lock described the government is based on social contract between the rulers and the ruled, that is citizens are obliged to obey only if the government protects their human rights.

The idea of human rights was initially associated with the struggle of the middle classes that sought rights that were originally granted to those of a higher class on the basis of natural human equality and inalienably natural rights. But even during this movement, the rights of propertied European males gained superior interest and women, 'savages' (natives or tribal), servants, and wage laborers of either sex, were not eligible to claim these rights. Claims of privilege were rationalized by arguments of racial superiority or assertions of superior virtue and were protected using force. After having accepted the idea of human rights, the dominant elite found it increasingly difficult to escape the logic of human rights- the rights that declared that all humans are equal.

In most of Europe, only the propertied elite had the right to vote and it was as late as the 19th century that efforts were made to extend the right to vote to others. The Women's Suffrage Movement demanding the right to vote was the beginning of women's right as human rights. Other rights such as the right of workers to organize themselves and the right to safe and humane working conditions were not recognized in most of the European countries until the First World War and much later in the United States. The Human Rights Movement gained momentum in the 5th, 6th and 7th decades of 20th century. And it was during this period that human rights became a major political issue. The fight against racial discrimination has gained prominence
over the last 30 years. Citizens have increasingly refused to accept regimes that do not provide for the protection of human rights.

As it stands now, people do not want to lose their human rights no matter what they do. These rights form a basic framework for the administration of society and political organization. Ensuring these rights is critical to the fate of the governing power of the state. In societies where human rights are denied, human rights may be revolutionarily claimed and in societies where they are respected and protected, there may be a constant reconstitution of rights, in various ways to protect human rights. Human rights include the rights such as

- The right to life
- The right to food,
- The right to shelter and necessities
- The right to health
- The right to education
- The right to dignity and liberty and
- The right to be free

These are all so integral to our well being and we cannot picture a life without them. Yet there are people across the world who are denied of these rights.

**The Human Rights Time Line – A Quick Glance**

The principles of human rights have been inspired from various documents and treaties. The concept of rights has evolved from religious texts administrative texts and other documents from various parts of the world, over
the last four centuries. It is fascinating to trace some of these documents that contain concepts of human rights, and how they were incorporated into the code.

The Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 BC)

The earliest of these documents is the Code of Hammurabi, the ruler of Babylonia, a rival Mesopotamian kingdom conquered the other Mesopotamian kingdoms and issued a law code to administer his new kingdom. His code consolidates the earlier regulations of the rival kingdoms of Akkad and Sumer on Practical aspects of trade labour property, family, slavery and included the "eye for an eye tooth for a tooth punishment". This Code was carved on a stone column discovered in Iran in 1901 and is now kept in Paris. It is in clay tablet versions and is believed that it was posted to inform the literate citizens of their rights.

The Judeo-Christian Traditions (c. 1200 BC. 100 CE)

In Israel early people believed in the concept of one Universal God and humanity. They believed that the course of humanity depended on obedience of God's laws. The Hebrew Scriptures recorded the beliefs of people as given to them by God. They also form the basic religious code of Christians and Muslims. The Christians call these scriptures the Old Testament while the Muslims regard the first five books, the Torah as divine scripture. The Tora contains the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, which commanded respect for life and property of strangers and neighbors. Principles such as the asylum tradition in churches and synagogues and the concept that one is 'innocent until proven guilty' etc were originated in Jewish law.
Coming to the Common Era the teaching contained in the New Testament of the Christians appear to have played a major role in influencing the votaries of human rights in codifying them into what we have today. Disciples of Jesus Christ wrote letters and accounts of his life, which were circulated among early Christian churches and which later become the New Testament in which Jesus is reported to have quoted the Old Testament on several occasions and corrected some of the anomalies that were being followed until then. Jesus was even angry against religious leaders and the Roman Empire. He denounced hypocrisy, healed the sick and treated women foreigners and the poor with dignity. The Apostle Paul who wrote some New Testament books in prison, and that among Jesus people," there is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free male nor female." It also says that Jesus preached that rights come together with responsibilities and urged his followers to feed the hungry clothe the naked and forgive the enemies.

Confucius (c 551-479 BC)

Confucius was a great philosopher who taught government and social reform. His philosophical teachings revolved around Zen or benevolence that he expressed in his sayings: “Do not do to other what you would not like yourself” and “Do unto others what you with to do unto yourself.” He believed that people should have practiced Zen with those who are in social or spiritual hierarchy and by the government. His teachings were collected in his Analects and spread by 3000 disciples and became a code of conduct and a way of life for many people, which made him the most influential philosopher in Chinese history.
The Magna Carta (1215 CE)

The English ruler, King John I (1215) imposed heavy taxes on his people to finance expensive unsuccessful wars and refused to accept the authority of the Church and ordered that Churches should be closed for years. He was extremely unpopular among the nobles and the clergy who rallied against his power and subjected him to the rule of law by making him enact a great charter of liberties known as the **Magna Carta**. Though the aberrant King soon violated this it became the source of many rights and liberties. The US national and state Constitutions contain ideas and even phrases directly traceable to the Magna Carta/ Such as the concept of "no taxation without representation." And the principle of habeas corpus or due process of law which provides that" no free man shall be arrested or imprisoned...(or dispossessed) except by lawful judgment.

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648 CE)

The Treaty of Westphalia named after the region of Germany where it was signed brought to an end the wars in Europe spurred by the church reform movement of the 1500's the Catholic Counter Reformation and Sovereignty disputes. This Treaty was the base of the modern notion of national sovereignty by freeing state rulers from the authority of the Catholic Church. It gave rulers the freedom to choose their subjects religion and provided that rulers could forfeit the lends of those who changed religions. Religious tolerance was supported and in some states Catholic or Protestant minorities were allowed private worship, liberty of conscience and emigration. The concept of freedom to worship was probably built upon this concept.
The English Bill of Rights (1689 CE)

In 1689 in order to deal with arbitrary rulers such as King James II who often dispensed with law in the state, the English Parliament passed a bill declaring that it would no longer tolerate royal interference in its affairs. The Bill of Rights, which became part of the foundation of the English Constitution, gave the British the right to freedom from an arbitrary government. It forbade royalty to suspend law without Parliament’s consent, specified free elections for members of Parliament, and provided for the protection of the freedom of speech in Parliament which was not to be questioned in the courts or elsewhere. It also prohibited taxation or maintenance of an army in peacetime without Parliament’s consent, excessive bail or fines, and cruel and unusual punishment to offenders and criminals.

The United States and their Declaration of Independence (1776)

The representatives of Britain’s 13 Colonies first convened in 1774 to protest against British policies and after the American Revolution had begun they convened again and voted for independence from Britain. Later they adopted the Declaration of Independence, forming the first government of the 13 Colonies of the United States. The Declaration was based largely on Locke’s and Montesquieu’s ‘natural rights’ theories. And listed the colonist’s grievances against King George accusing him of systematic tyranny and announced their separation from Great Britain and proclaimed the creation of the United States to justify the revolution. Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write the Declaration due to his literary skill and apparently denounced the slave trade that defamed the English People but was then rejected by the Congress.

The United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights (1787,1791)
Confronted with economic problems and armed revolt within the states, the 1781 Constitution was rethought and redefined with the aim of centralizing and strengthening the government and yet aiming to limit its power enough to guarantee individual liberty. For this 26 Amendments to the Constitution were made and they have by and large established specificity and have made it adaptable to various crises of human affairs thorough judicial reinterpretation. The American Constitution is the oldest in operation and one of the most influential documents in Western history.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789)

The French Declaration was influenced by the success of the American Revolution and exemplified the thought of Voltaire, Montesquieu's, the Encyclopaedists, and Rousseau. The efforts were made for political and economic reformation but it could not succeed. However the legacy of the Declaration prevailed as it attacked monarchy and defined natural rights as "liberty, property, security, and the right to resist oppression." This replaced the system of aristocratic privileges that had existed under the monarchy with the principle of equality before the law.

The Proclamation of Emancipation (1863)

Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Emancipation during the third year of the Civil War to preserve the Union, on January 1, 1863. It stated that all people held as slaves within rebellion states in the United States are henceforth and henceforward free. Though he believed in white supremacy, growing pressure from the Congress and the country led him to become sympathetic to the slaves. Although the proclamation by itself did not free any slaves, it made the freedom of slaves a virtual certainty and aided in the passing of the thirteenth amendment that outlawed slavery nationwide in
1865. It also announced the acceptance of black men into the Union army and
nary, which led to the involvement of 200,000 black soldiers and sailors
fighting for the Union and freedom.

The Geneva Conventions (1864,1949)

The International Red Cross was responsible for the Geneva Convention
of 1864 the first international treaty which governed the conduct of nations in
wartime and marked the origin of modern humanitarian and human right law.
It provided for the treatment of sick and wounded soldiers. It has been revised
and amended several times and the current version, approved in 1949 after the
Second World War consists of four separate conventions. The first and second
provide for the care of the sick and wounded in land and maritime warfare the
third deals with treatment of prisoners of war and the fourth deals with
protection of civilians and non-combatants. Together they seek to ensure the
protection of human dignity even during hostilities. The International
Committee of the Red Cross still controls and monitors its provisions.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)

M.K.Gandhi an Indian who began his career in South Africa where he
practiced law and agitated against racism directed at Indians. It was there that
he developed his philosophy of non-violent confrontation based on respect for
life. He called it satyagraha (the force of truth). He returned to India and in
response to a massacre by the British, led a series of satyagraha campaigns until
India achieved independence in 1947. He supported movements against class
discrimination promoted Muslim-Hindu unity, women's rights and basic
education. He was bestowed the title of the Mahatma (great soul) and his
influence has been felt around the world, particularly in South Africa and the
United States where major civil rights movements were based on his ideas.
The United Nations Charter (1945)

The UN Charter was signed by 51 states after the Second World War in 1945, thereby establishing the United Nations Organization dedicated to maintaining peace and security and cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems. Its signatories disagreed on the nature of these human rights, which is why the first UN conference rejected a proposal to include protection of human rights as an article of the Charter. Under the Charter, the UN General Assembly and its High Commission of Human Rights (UNHCHR) has primary responsibility for promoting human rights. The UN High Commission was instrumental in creating declarations and covenants on human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Though not legally enforceable, these documents are used to interpret the human rights provisions of the UN Charter.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

As human rights in the UN Charter were very unclear, the UN assigned a Commission chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt to clarify the Charter's references to human rights. This resulted in the UN General Assembly adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a statement of universal goals concerning human rights and freedom. Although it is not legally binding, its content has been incorporated into many national Constitutions and has become a standard measure of human rights around the world.
Human Rights-The International Standpoint

The protection of human rights was accepted as an international issue only after the Second World War. Prior to that extreme violation of human rights and abuse such as the genocidal massacres by Russian programmes against the Jews and the Turkish slaughter of Armenians were met with polite statements of disapproval. How a government treated its own citizens was considered a matter of sovereign domestic jurisdiction and individual states and the international community were under an international legal obligation not to intervene in such matters.

The Covenant of the League of Nations did not mention human rights as subject of legitimate international concern. The Holocaust, in which the German Nazis systematically attempted to eliminate European Jewry, played important part in pushing the issue of human rights into the mainstream of international relations. Though genocide might have been punishable under the laws of war in killing German national it was merely exercising its sovereign rights. Such issues are now tackled as human right abuse and being dealt with in an international arena.
Table 1.4

Milestones in the Evolution of Human Rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.1750 BCE</td>
<td>Code of Hammurabi, Babylonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.1200-c300 BCE</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.551-c.479 BCE</td>
<td>Confucius-&quot; Do unto others what you wish to do unto yourself.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.40-100CE</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>644-656CE</td>
<td>Koran (original text)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>Magna Carta, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>Code of Nezahualcoyotl, Aztec</td>
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<tr>
<td>1648</td>
<td>Treaty of Westphalia, Europe</td>
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<td>1689</td>
<td>English Bill of Rights, England</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence, United States</td>
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<td>1787</td>
<td>United States Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>French Declaration on the Rights of Man and the Citizen, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>United States Bill of Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864,1949</td>
<td>League of Nations Covenant</td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>League of Nations Covenant</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>Slavery Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>United Nations Charter, San Francisco</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>European Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights</td>
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<td></td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Rights</td>
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Source: Partners in Human Rights Education Website
Development of Human Rights in India

During the British rule in India, the establishment of Constitutional Government and parliamentary institutions declared the fundamental rights in the sense of civil liberties resulted for development of human rights in India.

Everatt J., (1981):81 described that the women's movement that emerged in 1880s, drew an attention of educated families and inspired women's participation in social and political activities. In the beginning of nineteenth century, noted reformists like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Kesavachndra Sen, Ranade and Karve fought against plight and immolation of women and lobbied for legislation which resulted into right to protection for women against atrocities.

The Indian National Congress established in 1885, struggled for the rights of the Indian people. The early moderate leaders appreciated the British sense of justice and fair play, they also criticized the alien rule for depriving the Indian people the rule of law that prevailed in England. In 1897 Surendranath Banerjee denounced the British rule on the ground that while it was proud of itself on the Magna Carta and the Habeas Corpus, it denied the Indians the inestimable right to personal liberty.

At the call of Mahatma Gandhi the people of the country went on sattyagraha against the Rowlett Act of 1919 that became the cause of the tragedy of JallianWalaBagh of Amritsar on 13 April, 1919. All great leader like Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajapat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, C.R.Das strongly argued for the rights of the Indian people and condemned the British rule for depriving the rule of law in India.

The famous women's liberation organizations viz Banga Mahila Samaj (BSM), Theosophical Society, Bharat Stri Mahamandal founded in 1910 and Annie Beasant’s Women's Indian Association (WIA) established in 1917, Lady
Aboordeen's and Lady Tata's National Council of Women in India (NCWI) founded in 1925 and Margaret Cousin's All India Women's Conference (AIWC) established in 1927, all such organizations played vital role in promoting the modern ideals for women, especially women's education, moral and material progress and abolition of social evils. All these resulted in enhancing equality of rights and opportunities to women in the field of political, economic and family sphere of life.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the U.N. General Assembly in December 1948 had its definite impact on the framing of the Indian Constitution. The makers incorporated in part III of the Constitution a host of rights relating to equality, freedom, non-exploitation, religion, education and culture and constitutional remedies. Moreover the constitution has empowered the Supreme Court and High Courts to issue prerogative writs for the protection and enforcement of these rights termed as Fundamental Rights. Some rights, which could not be accommodated, in part III have been put in to part IV of the constitution termed as Directive Principles of State Policy. The point of distinction between the two parts is that while the former is mandatory the latter is not so. It is well commented: “The two parts of the Constitution – the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles– covered all most the entire field of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Concept of Empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world, and particularly by Third world feminists. Its source can be traced to the interaction between feminism and the concept of “popular education” developed in Latin America in the 1970s. It refers to the process of
strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various inequalities and gender discrimination. It primarily aims at providing power to women to become free from the control of others, in other words to assume power to control their own life and to determine their own conditions. It also aims at providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power position to women so as to facilitate them to play able role equal to that of men in the society.

The literature describing empowerment practice is based primarily on empowerment theory and case examples of practice. The focus of this literature has been on definitions of empowerment practice and description of specific methods and outcomes.

Power is the key word of the term “Empowerment” which prescribes three perspectives.

- Control over material assets, that may be of any type- physical, human, financial, such as land, water, forests, and agencies, labour, money and access to money.
- Empowerment of intellectual resources, includes knowledge and information,
- Empowerment of ideology signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behavior, virtually determining how people perceive, think and function in given socio-economic and political environment.

Sociological literature denotes that three E’s viz education, employment and empowerment are basic dimensions for advancement and progress of women. These would facilitate women in accessing and exercising full control over one’s action.
"Empowerment means being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home and it also means having women's contribution recognized and valued.

According to Webster's New World Dictionary (1982), this prefix is used to form verb meaning, "to make, make into or like, cause to be". Thus "to empower" is to make or cause power, yet, the actual definitions offered for "empower" are (1) to give power or authority to; (2) give ability to; enable; permit".

The Social Work Dictionary (Barker 1991) defines empowerment as "the process of helping a group or community to achieve political influence or relevant legal authority". Empowerment is often described as building "community capacity" which involves enhancing the aptitude of community group to procure and manage social and economic resource implies a focus on developing the resources and skills necessary for individuals and communities to exert authority and power.

According to Hall (1992) "empowerment means to participation or involvement in projects in a functional sense, to the control over decisions regarding all aspects of one's life and livelihood".

According to Oakley and Marden (1994) the term "empowerment is used more in the latter sense, of attempting to change the social and economic institutions that embody the basic and unequal power structure in society whether between individual men and women or groups of people".

According to Bookman and Morgen(1988),"the process of empowerment involves not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also equal participation in decision making processes, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains"
Empowerment clearly leads to a better sense of self-worth, often through collective action, which aims at, among other things, economic improvement. For, as Andre Beteille (1999:590) argues empowerment is largely about ordinary and common people, rather than politicians, experts and other socially or culturally advantaged persons; improvement in the quality of life is integral to understanding the term.

Pillai (1995), elucidated that “Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity. And empowerment is not a commodity to be transacted, nor can it be given away, “power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved”

The World Population Report 1994 states very clearly “Empowering women means extending choices, choice about if and when to get married, choice about education, employment opportunities controlling the social and physical environment choice about if and when to get pregnant and ultimately about family size. Empowerment requires support from husbands, family members and communities help to promote a healthy social environment.

Empowering girls and women is the process through which girls and women are able to gain better control over their lives economic and social resources, supportive laws and policies, as well as propitious social condition are the essential factors for their empowerment.

The empowerment of women provides the basis for realizing equality between men and women by ensuring equal access of rights in political and public life. It includes the right to vote and to contest elections, as well as the right to education and employment. It calls for measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women in the areas of health care, economic, social, marriages and family relations and it calls for the
modification of social and cultural patterns to eliminate prejudice customs and other practices, which perpetuate the low status of women. Empowering women are raises their status. It can be achieved only when women’s empowerment is achieved in all spheres in the home, reproductive decision, making in education, in the workplace and in the political, legislative and public policy matters.

In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and power, and to transformation action.

The Programme of Action (POA) Cairo Conference (1994) laid down the following parameters of women’s empowerment.

- Recognizing women’s contribution, women’s knowledge,
- Awakening women to fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.
- Enhancing their self-respect and self dignity
- Women controlling their own bodies.
- Women becoming economically independent and self-reliant.
- Women controlling resources like land and property.
- Reducing women’s burden of work, Especially within the home.
- Promoting qualities of nurturing caring, gentleness, not just in.
- Building a positive self-image and self-confidence
- Development ability to think critically.
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action.
- Ensuring equal participation if the process of bringing about social change.
- Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society.
• Providing the economic independence.
• Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence of women;
• Fostering decision making and action through collective processes: enable women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health (especially reproductive health)
• Ensuring equal participation in development processes.
• Providing information, knowledge and skills for economic independence; enhancing access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights and entitlement in society with a view to enhancing their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Empowerment of women would necessarily mean redefining the notions of feminists and masculinity changing man-women relationship. This is something more and more are now taking about. Contrary to the rumors, which are spread feminists, are not against men. They are against patriarchy as a system against aggressive masculinity. They want men who are gentle, who are caring. The models of good men for us are not muscular, aggressive supermen but men like Buddha, Basaveshwara, Jesus Christ Mahatma, Guru Nanak and Mahatma Gandhi. They want husbands who can not only act as fathers but also as mothers.

Empowerment of Women in Indian Context

The first effort on the global level was made in 1975, the year, which was observed, as the international women’s year and it had its Motto—Equality Development and Peace. During the year meetings, rallies, seminars, symposia and conferences were held in all the states of India and in all most all the countries of the world. The main objective of these programmes was on the problems of women and long-term programme, for their solutions. The term empowerment has become popular in the field of development especially with
reference to women in the mid 1980 empowerment has become the key solution to any social problems like high population growth rates, low status of women, gender bias etc.

During the past two decades, empowerment practice in the human services has emerged from efforts to develop more effective and responsive services for women. The goal of this method of practice is to address the role powerlessness plays in creating and perpetuating personal and social problems, it can be distinguished by its focus on developing critical awareness, increasing feelings of collective and self-efficacy, and developing skills for personal interpersonal or social change. Within our increasingly diverse society empowerment has emerged as one perspective on practice that can be inclusive and supportive of diversity.

In India, it is the sixth five-year plan (1980-85), which can be taken as a landmark for the cause of women. It is here that concept of women and development was introduced for the first time. It was realized that no more piecemeal strategies but an integrated approach would deliver the desired goods. The realistic and regenerative development efforts in the direction of progress, in terms of economic independence for women and educational advancement of them is what would answer the basic questions raised for empowering women.

Over two decades of the women's movement across India, we have seen an increasing emphasis on the promotion of grassroots-level organizations for women's status and empowerment. The phrase 'status of women', though a clinch, has its uses despite countrywide variation. On the whole, irrespective of what the specifics are, status involves roles, expectations, entitlements, rights and obligations; awareness of these is achieved through what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) has characterized as conscientisation or, more
simply, consciousness-raising. In many cases, women are unaware of their legal rights, unable (or not allowed) to take decisions and greatly influenced by a family ideology that emphasizes the dominance of the male. Broadly speaking, women's organizations aim at creating general awareness on these issues as well as work towards more specific action plans on area-wise problems.

Kabeer (1996), Razvi and Miller (1995) in their study stated that, 'The growth of these organizations needs to be seen in the context of other developments in related to theory and practice. From the 1980s onwards, issues raised by Women in Development (WID) and, lately, Gender and Development (GAD) approaches have acquired greater importance, both for governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women's organizations. While WID concentrates more on women's economic activities, GAD tackles the question of inequalities in power and looks to empowerment in all fields. Depending on internal constraints and proclivities as well as external conditions, women's organizations and NGO's can use one or both approaches.

Andre Beteille (1999), says most of the analysis around it so far has been contexts driven than theory driven. It is important to look at the context in which discussions over empowerment and indeed women's empowerment have arisen. On the whole, the context is one where there is a contradiction between a hierarchical social order and a democratic political system (ibid: 589), where the rights of citizenship and a democratic constitution founder against entrenched tradition and prejudice. The process of empowerment, which can be understood in many ways-, aims at overcoming these disabilities through a range of strategies.
Human Rights as Inspiration to Empowerment

Human rights principles uphold the visions of free, just and peaceful world and set minimum standards for how individuals and institutions everywhere should treat people. Human rights also empower people with a framework for action when those minimum standards are not met, for people still have human rights even if the laws or those in power do not recognize or protect them.

We experience our human rights every day in India when we worship according to our belief, or choose not to worship at all; when we debate and criticize government policies; when we join a trade union; when we travel to other parts of the country or overseas. Although we usually take these for granted, people both here and in other countries do not enjoy all these liberties equally. Human rights violations also occur everyday in this country when a parent abuses a child, when a family is homeless, when a school provides inadequate education, when women are paid less than men. Women's empowerment is a global issue, and discussions on women's rights are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide.

It is observed that from the very beginning girls in India are socialized to accept male supremacy and negate the importance of their needs. While gender discrimination exists in providing care to the girl child in areas of health, nutrition, education and distribution of work during early childhood years. It is further highlighted in adolescence. On set of puberty decreases their autonomy and mobility with increasing restrictions on social communications, be it speech, appearance, social mobility conduct of interaction with males etc. Instead of learning to be more self-reliant, independent and socially responsive girls take over the mother's domestic chores and start identifying with their stereotypes gender role. By the time
Meera Chatterjee in her report. On "Indian women from birth to twenty" writes that "socialization of girls using sex themes: unwanted, neglected, underdeveloped, undeveloped used, liability and exploitation. "Women represent fifty percent of population, make up thirty percent of the official labour force, perform sixty percent of all working hours, receive ten percent of the world income and own even less than one percent of the world property". This is the lawful economic profile of women in the world, and also true of Indian women and very much true of rural women.

Role of Statutory Bodies in Expansion of Human Rights Awareness

The activities of Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), an autonomous body being linked with State Social Welfare Advisory Board established in 1953, promoted and strengthened voluntary efforts for the welfare of women. CSWB lays down the budget and it has allotted in five-year plan the emphasis on enhancing the human rights, it has stressed on women welfare activities relating to their health, nutrition, education and family planning. Similarly The Ministry of Welfare, Government of India also gives grants to N.G.O's for the activities that boost women to excel in exercising the rights to achieve their empowerment.

The National Commission for women (NCW) established on 31st January 1992, gives scope to probe into the status of women, to study the statutory loopholes and gaps; to look into the causes of gender discrimination and violence against women and it suggests all possible remedies.

Besides assuring the Constitutional fundamental rights, the state has also been empowered to enact special laws for protecting the interests of giving preferential treatment to females. On the ground of this, the governments
have been taken legislative measures from time to time for performing their obligation of bringing in a social order in which justice prevails.

Besides all fundamental rights being assured by Indian constitution, state has also enacted special laws for protecting the interests of and giving preferential treatment to females. During the last 60 years, a number of laws have been enacted/amended to ensure equality of status and opportunity for women. These laws may be classified in three levels.

i) Social Laws

The major issues relevant to women and relating to social laws are, marriage, adoption, guardianship, and abortion, such related laws are The special Marriage Act of 1954, Hindu marriage Act of 1955, Widow Remarriage Act of 1956, Child marriage Restraint Act of 1976, and Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961. All these give special rights to women in regard to mate selection, age at marriage, polygamy, invalidity of marriage, defective or void marriages, divorce, restitution of conjugal rights, alimony and maintenance, custody of child, dowry and remarriage.

The law pertaining to adoption of children passed in 1956, called the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act allows to adopt a child.

The laws relating to progeny and abortion are : Pre-natal, Diagnostic Techniques Test Detection Act prohibits the medical termination of pregnancy. This act was passed in 1972, which legally permitted pregnant woman to abort the unwanted child.

ii) Economic Laws

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956, The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 and The Factory Act of 1948 etc., are providing right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions, maternity benefits and job security and health facilities.
iii) Political Laws

The two important rights in the political field sanctioned to women are female enfranchisement and eligibility for the legislature. The recent 73rd & 74th Amendment in the constitution provided reservation of seats for women in panchayats and municipalities. As a result of this the number of women voters and women's representatives in Assemblies and Parliament has increased sufficiently.

In addition to all statutory steps mentioned above, some of the major initiatives, like Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1986, Indecent Representation of women (prohibition) Act, Commission of Sati (prevention) Act 1987, National Perspectives for Women 1988 to 2000, and Shrama-Shakti Report of the National Commission on self-employed women etc, also facilitated in protecting the interest and empowering the women.

Efforts for Empowerment of Women through Five year Plans.

In the earlier plans women development efforts were guided by welfare orientation. Development in the conditions of women was conceived as advancement in different fields through the implementation of various programmes and schemes.

The concept of women's development in the first five-year plan (1951-56) was mainly "welfare" oriented. The Central social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up in 1953 and undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector, working in the area of development of women, particularly, the rural women. In the second five year plan (1956-61) women were organized into Mahila Mandalas to act as focal points at the grass-root levels for the development of women. It was felt that unless education and health levels among the women are improved, they could not make any progress in their conditions. Accordingly, the third and fourth fifth plans (1961-1974) laid
stress on the promotion of health and education among the women. In the sphere of health, a number of schemes were taken up to promote maternal health services to women along with general health facilities in these plans. Similarly, schemes aiming at the provision of scholarships, establishment of schools exclusively for girls, free supply of text books, grant of fee concessions etc., were implemented on a massive scale for the improvement of education among girls. The fifth five year plan (1974-78) made a shift from welfare to development of women to increase their capabilities for playing an active role in the development process. Accordingly, several developmental programmes were implemented for improving the socio-economic status to improve the earning capacity of women by providing them employment opportunities in the agriculture and allied sectors like dairy etc. This plan emphasized on the integration of developmental and welfare programmes to improve the overall position of women, particularly, the rural women. The Sixth Plan (1980-85) adopted a multidisciplinary approach with focus on health, education and economic betterment of women. The main thrust of this plan was to enhance the social and economic position of women in order to help them to cross the poverty line. In the Seventh Plan (1985-90), the developmental programmes for women continued with the major objective of raising their economic and social status and to bring them into the mainstream of national development. The basic approach was to inculcate confidence among women and bring about the potential awareness for their empowerment as also of their rights and privileges based on equality. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) This Plan marks a shift from ‘development’ to ‘empowerment’ of women. It focused on the empowerment of women to make them equal partners and participants along with men in the national development process. The plan adopted a holistic approach towards the development of women as opposed to
the restricted approach adopted by the earlier plans. This plan gave top priority to the economic empowerment through the provision of employment opportunities and training particularly of the rural areas. The provision for proper nutrition and health facilities to the poor women was much stressed upon in this plan. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) evolved certain new and novel strategies for the promotion of welfare and development of women. The Plan advocated that empowerment of the women first starts with awareness and confidence and their transformation would follow in due course. In accordance with this strategy, the Plan suggested the reservation of certain seats for women in the Parliament and Legislative Assemblies of various States. The Plan also proposed the reservation of jobs for them in public sector including higher civil services. This plan also proposed several new initiatives for the health and educational development of women. The plan emphasized on free education to girls up to the college level and also greater vocational training to them. The plan ensured participation of women in industrial development, and proposed the setting up of development Banks for providing the women entrepreneurs, the financial assistance to start small-scale industries. However, the most novel feature of this Plan is the incorporation of a special component to ensure the flow of 30% of the total Plan funds to the women development programmes. By earmarking 30% of funds in all the programmes for the development of women, it is hoped that “trickling down” from the above would take place resulting; in the socio-economic betterment of the women and ultimately their empowerment. In the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) an important approach was adopted for the empowerment of women. With a view to translate the National Policy for Empowerment of women into action, a National Plan of Action for Empowerment of women has been contemplated. To eliminate all types of discrimination against women

46
and the girl child, major strategies included were social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice. Two important schemes in the areas of education and literacy special schemes like Swyamsiddha, Swashakti, Rastriya Mahila Kosh, Swaavalambhan, and Training-cum-Employment Programme, Swadhar and Hostel for Working Women are implemented to achieve empowerment of women.

**Various Schemes for Empowerment of Women**

Apart from the general sector programmes the women empowerment received priority in all the poverty eradication programmes launched during the post independent period. The emphasis of these programmes is on the economic betterment of women by providing them employment and income generating assets. The prominent poverty eradication programmes are the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the Programme for Training of Rural Youth and Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), the Rural Land less Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). The Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY), included special components for the women and they are viewed as special targeted group for providing assistance to undertake various activities. As a special and innovative programme named as the Development of Woman and Child in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was launched in April, 1981 as a component of IRDP to accelerate the process of integrating the rural women into the development process through economic empowerment. Under this DWCRA programme several thousands of selected women were encouraged to form self-help groups to undertake various economic activities with the funding provided by the Central and State Governments along with their own contribution as seed money. All these programmes helped the women to realize their inherent potential for taking up income generating activities on their own.
Policy Initiatives for Empowerment of Women

To back up its various schemes and programmes initiated for the development of women in various plans, the government prepared several policy instruments to guide its efforts of women empowerment in the form of action-plans and policy documents. The National Plan for Action for Women (1976) was drafted to guide the women development efforts. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women was adopted which suggested a long term holistic approach (1988-2000) for women's empowerment. The National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in Informal Sectors appointed in 1988 made a number of recommendations for the development of women in the informal sector by providing them legislative protection, training for skill development, marketing and credit facilities. The National Policy of Action for Women (1991-2000) adopted in 1991, suggested a plan of action for ensuring protection and promoting development of children, with special gender sensitivity aimed for the girl children and adolescent girls. In addition to these women specific policy initiatives, several general National Policies contain women welfare component. These Policies include the National Policy on Education (1986), the National Population Policy (1993) etc., which proposed several measures for the empowerment of women in the respective fields.

With an idea of creating a national level autonomous body to address women's issues and to act as a watchdog of their interests, the National Commission of Women was instituted in 1991 with an objective to watch and monitor the implementation of various constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women and also to make necessary suggestions for their effective implementation. Further, it also looks into the complaints regarding the violation of the rights of women. The commission has taken up a number of
activities like the formulation of expert committees to advise on issues related to women, to look into the complaints made by them against the violation of their rights, to promote awareness among the women about the various legal measures enacted or the protection of their rights and so on. 'The legal literacy manuals' (1992) were prepared to educate the women about their rights and safeguards and also about the provisions of various enactment existing for their protection. The manuals include the marriage laws, anti-dowry acts, rights to property acts, and also those laws providing them protection against rape, various types of harassment including sexual abuses and so on. These manuals were written in various regional languages in very simple style and were distributed among the women through various governmental and voluntary agencies.

Another innovative initiative taken by the Government is the creation of the Integrated Child Development Services, (ICDS) which provides a package of services to the children and mothers living in the most backward rural and tribal areas and in urban slums all over the country to improve their health and nutritional status. Started in 1975, the ICDS was gradually expanded to cover the entire country. The ICDS Projects located in the country are getting financial aid from the World Bank for taking up several innovative schemes.

Apart from the special policy initiatives the Government has created several agencies and also initiated certain measures to strengthen the administrative mechanism for the effective implementation of all those initiatives. The Central Government had set up in 1992 the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) in the Ministry of Human Resource Development exclusively for attending the development of women and children. The Department is conceived as a nodal agency for formulating
policies and programmes for the development of women and children. It coordinates the activities of various governmental agencies and NGOs engaged in the development of women. The department concentrates on the implementation of programmes in the area of employment and income generation, gender sensitization, welfare and support services and so on. These programmes implemented under various schemes in accordance with the Eight-Plan strategy the Department laid emphasis on the employment and income generating activities for the economic empowerment of women.

The Central Government has launched the Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) in August 1995 as a mechanism to coordinate and integrate all the ongoing sectoral programmes of women development and to facilitate their convergence for the improvement of the economic conditions of women. The Support for Empowerment of Women Programme (STEP) is another similar programme undertaken by the Central Government for the economic empowerment of women by providing them employment in different sectors.

All these policy initiatives and administrative measures have attained mixed success in achieving their goal of improving the conditions of women in the country. They have achieved a certain level of development in their socio-economic conditions, which of course, is marked by unevenness. While the women among certain sections are fully benefited by various state sponsored initiatives and achieved significant progress in different fields, the women belonging to the weaker section, particularly, the SCs and STs are still backward and are not in a position to utilize the benefits of various developmental programmes and schemes. Hence not only the economic betterment but also the expected socio-cultural changes did not take place in their lives. Of course there are several reasons for the chasm between the stated goals and actual achievements in the field of women empowerment.
Theoretical Perspective

In order to generalize the fact, certain prominent and prevalent theoretical models are applied in this study. This has advanced our understanding as to how rights of women are being denied, oppressed and violated in their life and which has hindered in achieving their empowerment.

Psycho-Pathological or Psychiatric Theory.

This is popular theory, which psychiatrists propose to state about denial of rights. It throws a light on the oppressor’s personality characteristics as the prime determinants of female oppression or exploitation and hurtful behaviors. It links the factors such as personality defects, intra-individual abnormalities like inferiority complex and low intelligence because hurtful behavior against women. The main argument of this theory is that hurtful or oppressive behavior against women is so extensive in our society that it cannot be recognized as a pattern of family relations. Such oppressive behavior of men with women has become so common that they do not even consider it as abusive or hurtful or exploitative or violent. It is persisted that psychological violence and abuses are the products of aberrations, a kind of mental sickness, then those men who are believed to be well, their acts and behavior patterns cannot be considered hurtful or abusive. Further more, the psychiatric model serves as an ideal screen to blind us from considering social situational factors that cause hurtful behavior.

Socio-Situational Theory

This theory focuses on social factors like family stress, social conflict unemployment, poverty and low level of education, which are linked with hurtful behavior against females. The socio-situational theory of abusive or oppressive behavior pleads that abusive, hurtful behavior and violence take place mainly because of two factors (i) structural stress, and (ii) cultural norm.
The first refers to the link between women's abuse and their low income or inadequate financial resources. The second refers to norms in the family, kinship group, caste based behavior with women, including granting of rights to them. It explains that certain privileged status to women is being denied at home. This theory highlights the fact that structural stress as low income, unemployment low level of education etc, are unevenly distributed in society. While all groups and individuals, including adult males are socialized with the knowledge and values that they should be adorned and cared husbands, only some individuals and groups get sufficient resources to meet these demands, others fall considerably short of being able to have the physiological, social and economic resources to meet the expectations of society, friends, neighbors and loved ones. Combined with the cultural approval of giving low status to women, these shortfalls lead many individuals to ill-treat women at home or abuse/oppress them.

Social Learning Theory

It is an additional part of social situational theory. It focuses that abusive/oppressive behavior, is learnt from others while growing up in violent homes. This means if father, grandfather, uncles brothers deal with women in the family in an egoist manner, the younger male members will also learn the same behavior patterns. The family is the key place where people learn the behaviours as well as the social and moral justifications for them. These practices are transmitted from generation to generation. It is not uncommon to hear a father, in a family, denying the rights of mate selection to his sons and daughters or depriving his daughter of a share in his property or refusing his younger widowed sister to remarry. He justifies himself by explaining that he is following his family traditions and practices.
Resource Theory

William Goode (1971), argues that social systems like family, rest to some degree on force or threat of force or exploitation or abusive behavior develops this theory. The more resources- social, personal and economic- a person can command, the more force he/she can muster. Also, the more resources a person actually has, the less he/she will actually use force in an open manner. Thus a husband who wants to be the dominant person in the family but has little education, or is poor, or is unemployed and dependent for his support on his wife or has a low status job or lacks interpersonal skills, may choose to ill-treat/abuse/exploit/humiliate/hurt his wife, that is to say that he may use psychological violence to maintain the dominant position.

Ecological Theory

James Garbarino proposed this theoretical perspective in 1972 to explain individual maltreatment and the quality of environment in which a person and the family develop. Garbarino concerns himself not just with the family but with the complex interrelation of the many social systems that overlap with family life and influence human development. Garbarino also considers the political, economic and social factors that shape the quality of life for individuals and their families. From this complex series of overlapping factors and influences, Garbarino extracts two key elements that help explain the existence of abuse. First, as has been so often stated, is the cultural support for abusive behavior and using physical force against a member of the family. Second, is the level of family support in the environment? Less is the family support, greater is the risk of abuse and exploitation of individual members. In short, the ecological theory proposes that violence, abuse and oppression arise out of a mismatch of individual-to-individual and family to neighborhood and community. There is a risk of ill treatment, oppression, hurting behavior,
humiliation and exploitation when the functioning of the individuals is constrained by developmental problems. Women with disabilities and social or emotional handicaps are at increased risk of oppression and ill treatment. Males under considerable stress or who have personality problems are at much risky for ill-treating their wives. These conditions are worsened when social interaction between the spouses heightens the stress or make the personal problems worse. Thus, according to Garbarino, the degree of ill treatment and exploitation of women is high in families that are socially isolated.

**Patriarchy and Woman’s Oppression**

Dobash and Dobash (1979) have tried to analyze as to how oppression against women are found more in patriarchal dominant family. This theory finds out the source of family violence, including women’s exploitation in the society and how it is organized as opposed to within individual families or communities. Authors have opined that throughout history, oppression has systematically been directed towards women. Their central thesis is that economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support patriarchal social order and family structure. They argued that patriarchy leads to the subordination of women and causes the historical pattern of systematic violence directed against women in general and wives in particular.

**Exchange/Social Control Theory**

Gelles and Cornell have developed exchange or social control theory to analyze the violence/exploitation against women in the family. These authors found some basis to explain as to why oppressed women remained with oppressive men. Here it is assumed that human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishment and costs. In addition, an individual who supplies reward services to another obliges him/her to fulfill an obligation and thus the second individual must furnish benefits to the first
(Peter Blau, 1964). If reciprocal exchange of rewards occurs the interaction will continue, but if reciprocity is not received the interaction will be broken off. This break off will increase anger, resentment conflict and violence. People will use violence against family members when the costs of being violent do not outweigh the rewards.

There are a variety of costs for being oppressor/violent. First there is a possibility that the victim will hit back. Second, oppression could lead to the arrest/imprisonment of the oppressor; finally too much oppression may lead to the dissolution of the family.

Applying above theories, certain propositions are derived about denying of rights to women in side and out side of the family specifically the denial from husband to his wife and in-laws to their daughter-in-laws, either because they want to have a dominant position in the family or because they want to reduce the costs of being “oppressive”. And certain types of wives are at a greater risk of being oppressed for instance, those who are the husbands feel will refuse or fail to provide sufficient gratification in return their (husbands) “investment” of depriving themselves of certain position in the family. When a husband perceives the costs of being liberal and granting freedom and due rights to wife out-weighing the rewards, he would prefer to remain traditional. It is difficult to break the relationship between husband and wife, with the exception of getting divorced. Thus, with no alternative and much dissatisfaction of wife demanding justice and freedom, the husband may even resort to oppressive behavior or may ill-treat his wife.

These theories have given an appropriate theoretical base for the present study.
Review of Literature

There are innumerable studies undertaken both in the country and outside, as to the role of women in various fields of activity. Women as the subject for the study have become very popular in the International Decade of women. To review all the studies pertaining to women may not be relevant in the context of this particular study. Hence an attempt has been made in this section to review some of the important and relevant studies done on Human Rights and Empowerment of Women.

However a brief review of available literature relevant to the subject presented in following headings.

- Women and Empowerment
- Women's Rights
- Marriage and Family life
- Reproductive Rights
- Health and wellbeing
- Feminist Movement
- Gender Equality
- Labour and Employment
- Marginalization of Women
- Violation of Women Rights
- Girl child
- Women and Urbanization

1. Empowerment of Women

K. Shanthi (1998) in her study on "Empowerment of Women", narrates about the existing empowerment strategies and their short comings. She explains the need for Social, Economic, Political, Legal and Cultural empowerment of women and the existing options for the same. She speaks
about the role of education and employment as important tools for empowerment. Role of governmental and non-governmental organizations need conscientization of men and women on the importance of women development and women empowerment.

Shobita Rajagopal and Kanchan Mathur (2000), have written “Economic Empowerment through State Benevolence”. These writers argue that the states feudal culture and patriarchal structures that determine low status of women. The writers consider that the policy by definition is a statement of intent and therefore can not be questioned. Yet it needs to be analyzed and reviewed in the context of several initiatives undertaken for women’s development.

Joshi, Sneha and Pushpanadham.K (2001), in their work on “Empowering Women for Educational Management”, outlined the social and psychological dilemmas faced by women in today’s changing society. It enumerates some of the international and domestic efforts made to empower women and examines the question of women’s access to leadership positions in education. The need for women to be educational managers is explored and measures have been considered that could be undertaken to enroll more and more women into leader position in education.

Mukta Mittal (1995) in her study on “Empowering the Rural women” focused on problematic position of Indian rural women and need of development. While highlighting on problems of women, the writer interprets that, in India rural women constitute nearly half of population, their lives are attributed with hard work, drudgery and without any basic amenities. They are trapped in the vicious circle of low income, ill health, low nutrition, low productivity, low wages, low health status, inadequate care and lack of educational opportunities. From the point of view of empowering the women, she stressed on awakening role of women in decision making in the family and
in the community in their educational status, their participation in social,
political and economic activities their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce
and inheritance of property.

Jaya Indirasen (2002) in her work “Education for women's
empowerment Gender positive Initiatives in Pace-Setting Women's colleges”,
stressed about need for achievement of empowerment of women. She
reinforced the fundamental tenet of education, the importance of recognizing
and nurturing individual differences and emphasizes the urgent need for
special efforts, positive and active intervention of women to become self-
reliant and confident.

Shakuntala Narsimhan, (1999) in her work “Empowering Women An
Alternative Strategy from Rural India”, highlighted about the role of N.G.O's
in achieving empowerment of women. This is the study about effectiveness of
an alternative strategy of development and empowerment that has been put
into practice by AWARE, a non-governmental organization (N.G.O) in
Andrapradesh. The model is spelt out by the N.G.O that lays stress on
awareness generation, motivation and psychological empowerment rather
than just economic interventions. She assessed the effectiveness of the N.G.O
by studying its activity help to empower the distressed rural women. The
author brings the transformations in the lives of women.

John G.Sommer, (2001) while studying on “Empowering the oppressed”
establishes the fact that substantive and qualitative improvement in the lives of
the most downtrodden of those battling discrimination on account of caste,
class or gender- can be achieved only when the root causes of their oppression
are addressed. The core message is that injustice and oppression can not be
tolerated, so the socio-economic and political dynamics in society are to be
altered and meaningful development is to occur.
Venkatesh. B. Athreya and Sheela Rani chunkath (1995) in their work on “Literacy and Empowerment” have raised many pertinent issues and provide indicators of the dynamics of successful literacy campaign. The authors, emphasise on Voluntarism, highlight the point that only the availability of ample funds is not a necessary condition for success, it will be interesting to those who are looking for grassroots level experience in promoting mass literacy campaign in societies marked by poverty, non-literacy, socio-economic disparities and diversities.

Vidyka K.C. (1997) wrote on political Empowerment of women at the grassroots. The objectives of the study were to examine the structural and functional aspect of pachayat Raj and the Scope of women’s participation in decision-making and implementation of developmental planning. Author’s concern is “Reservation for women is essential as the political empowerment of the hitherto marginalized section, to change the existing power relations and dilute entrenched patriarchy. It is worth pondering that reservation has been only for local self-governments or panchayat Raj.

Rao. L Kurup and R. Sudarshan (eds) (1996) in their work on “The Structural Contest for Empowering women in India”, the overall, richness of the book lies in collating the multitude of perceptions encompassing the social, cultural, political, legal and economic structures that are relevant to women’s empowerment in India.

Papanek (1990:168) highlighting the need of women’s empowerment, states that efforts are being made in many places to mobilize women—especially very poor women—so that they can more effectively act in their own interests vis-à-vis employers, landowners, money lenders and other powerful interests implicitly and explicitly. These efforts stress the importance of women’s empowerment that is learning through collective action that they
can successfully challenge individuals and institutions opposed to their self interests.

Deepa Narayan (1995) introduces the empowerment framework and makes reference to the World Bank publication and she explains how to develop and implement pro-poor policies and programmes using the empowerment framework by focusing on four elements: access to information, inclusion/participation, accountability, and local organizational capacity building.

Kabeer (1990) looks upon women empowerment as a radical transformation of power relations between men and women, this approach to the gender inequality talks of the empowerment of women. It holds that mere economic development of women cannot bring them at par with men, rather it reinforces the existing gender inequality. Along with economic development there must be social and political development of women.

Promilla Kapur (1978) also observes that even where the traditional joint family system breaks into nuclear units, it has given rise to a modified new type of joint family system. It merely breaks structurally; individual units continue to form part of joint family. Hence it is not unnatural that family as a microcosm of social universe in general and of joint family in particular, reflects in miniature all that dominance in which relationships are examined and judged.

Gavigan (1988) mentioned, nuclear families are carrying the patriarchal value structure without radical change. Indeed a girl child learns her first lessons in gender inequality within the family. She learns her primary role of caretaker as daughter, wife and mother, or sex-wise division of work, within the family. Even in economically better off families where women need not to
perform household work at least they are expected to supervise the same works performed by the servants.

Marlilyyn Carr, Martha Chen and Renana Jhabala (1997:1) in their work on "Women's Empowerment in South Asia", have argued that a major cause of poverty for women in south Asia is entrenched traditional structures; in addition, powerlessness exacerbates the feeling of inadequacy. And their situation is deeply influenced by ingrained structural inequalities inherent in the caste, community, religion, and patriarchal system.

2. Women's Rights in General

Asha Bajpai (1997), in her work "Women's Rights at the Workplace", discusses the effects of the post liberalization era on the women workers in organized and unorganized sectors and to recommend a legal strategy for empowerment of women comparing the situation with that of U.K. She explains that with the advent of globalization, women workers lost the job opportunities in unorganized sector. She felt the need of strict implementation of labour laws with particular emphasis on the unorganized workforce.

The Beijing Conference Report (2000) on "The Task Force on Women: India". This report reflects on women and girls in India since 1995. The report covers the deprived condition of women from tribal, rural and slum communities and invites an efforts from academicians, researchers. The report analyses on identified woman's issue world wide. The report explains the status of the issue as presented in different conventions and campaigns and speaks about the possible actions that need to be taken in future.

Ali Baug, Tara (1988), in their study on "Woman's rights" focused Women's Status and religious Fundamentalism. It enumerates the ill treatment meted out to the woman by man under the influence of the patriarchal system and the use of fear psychosis to tame the women. The
commentary concludes that the nation should utilize its funds for strengthening the nation rather than for religious fundamentalism.

Venkatesan, Jayshree, (1997) in a study on “Women’s Multiple Roles and Coping Strategies: ‘Myths and Realities’ illustrates how women mostly from the lower income group meet the competing demands of work and family, especially child care, through formal or informal facilities available to them. This study tries to remove some of the misconceptions associated with the life women about formal assistance to them.

Ram Ranjini’s (1998) work on “Divorced Women’s right to custody and guardianship of children”, explains the evolution and concept of custody and guardianship under the Hindu Law. It points out that the laws continue to be discriminatory and relegates the position of the mother to a secondary status. Divorce of parents proves to be very traumatic to the children. Finally some of the Indian Law Commissions recommendations aim at removing discrimination of children keeping in mind the welfare of the children.

Veeranna Aivalli (1989) while writing on “Human Rights Challenges in 21st century”, illustrated the concept of human rights. He focused much on importance and development of human rights. He tried to reveal that the growing violence of woman rights is confronting with humanity. He also considered that, there is a dilemma in enforcing and accessing human rights by the common people. At the end, he says a consistent campaign should be launched to increase the awareness about rights among human beings.

V.R.Krishna Iyer (1983) as his contribution to “Human Rights and Law”, illustrated that in 1930 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his friends formed the Civil Liberties Union, which was the first formation of human rights group in India. Later when he himself became the first Prime Minister of Independent India, by and large he accepted the objectives of Universal Declaration of
Human Rights of 1948. As a matter of realization, the basic ideals and inspirations of human beings ensured the dignity of human life everywhere.

Ronald Dworkin (1977) in his study on "Taking Rights Seriously" illustrates on theory of justice in different perspectives. It is basically a critical approach of positivists' theory of legal rights. It focuses on Rawls theory of human right that is useful, in understanding the perspectives of gender justice.

Abdul Rahim P. Vijapur (1991) in his edited volume entitled "Essays on contemporary Human Rights" focused several aspects of Human Rights, in the international scenario. This volume interprets, how the established, national and international statutory measures, play a pivotal role in protecting the Human Rights. In a critical approach, this work evaluated the dichotomy between international law and present existing situation of Human Rights.


Idrani Sridharan (1998) in her "practicing Human Rights a feminist perspectives" throws a light on role of statutory measures in protecting women rights. She mentioned specifically that the human rights are basically covered in political rights. She also interpreted that the cultural and religious traits defend the gender discrimination, violation and denial of individual rights to women, as a result she writes further that women are still subject to onerous and discriminatory restrictions of fundamental freedom.

Vimal Thorat (1997) in her book entitled "Dalit women and Human Rights some neglected issues", basically focuses on different problems of Dalit
women and non Dalit women. In this work main aspects, like a) specific problems of Dalit women concerning human rights violation b) stimulative reasons for violation of human rights of Dalit women and c) some basic issues suppose to be before the Human Rights Commission are highlighted. She also mentioned that, sexual violence among Dalit women is far more intense and wide spread. It is because of lower social attitude towards Dalit women and their economic dependence makes them become victims to the high caste sexual violence.

Nisha Jain (1998) in her study “Human rights: a Woman’s point”, mentioned about Right to dignity and right to equality and freedom are important element for smooth social-economic system. She also agrees that in order to empower women, it is also essential to emphasis the cultural factors. While tackling about the Human Rights, it is essential to emphasize the aspect of women rights, because in many cases women are forced to live in an environment, which is not conducive to their dignity. The domestic, the community, the civic and the political life still to recognize women as an equal human being.

Ashine Roy (2003) in her book on “Human Rights of Women” pointed out that women in India are traditionally more restricted in domestic role. They are more confined to private issues, rather than accessing public related social, economic, and political rights. It is argued that, there is tremendous potentiality in the women’s movement to put political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights together, as well as to be a force for a much more powerful understanding of human rights”. This claim brings challenge to traditional framework and also the promotion of rights in public or political arena.

Hasina Hashia (1998) who wrote “Human Rights in India: a Socio-Regional Analysis”, emphasized, that the violation of human rights, is more in
India, because there is a lacuna in awareness of accessing the rights among Indian women. It is stressed here that most of the violating activities occurring against women are not reported, and this tendency is found more among tribal and minority community. This work indeed is useful from the research point of view.

Jayatilak Guha Roy (1998) in his modest endeavor “Human Rights movements in modern India” assessed on the past, present and future of human rights movements in modern India. He made an effort of assessing role of various reformist movements in preserving protecting and promoting human rights in India. And he also interpreted the official Human Rights Institution like National Human Rights Commission, State Human Rights Commission and National Commission for women and the like as to how they have been playing catalyst role in creating awareness of human rights among people and in generating administrative concern for human rights in contemporary India.

3. Marriage and Family life

B. Sivaramayya (1983) in his study on “Status of Women and Social change”. Interprets Hindu laws and British laws in matters of rights to protect women’s marital social status and examines legislature in matters of bigamy, conjugal rights, inheritance, divorce maintenance under Hindu Marriage Act and Muslim personal laws. An attempt is also made by the author to critically examine the social status of women by way of legislation, judicial interpretations and processes.

Chowadhary Prem, (1994), gave an insight on “Widow Remarriage”. He explores the apparently progressive practice of widow remarriage in the in India, which has several possible repressive aspects, including forcible remarriage into mismatched and undesirable alliances, polygamy and being
deprived of inheritance rights. Widow remarriage in its levirate form is popular among the landowning classes as it emanates out of the desire to retain landed property within the family.

4. Reproductive Rights

Raju.K.N. and T.N. Mand Bhat (1998), in their survey on “Gender issues in the choice and adoption of family planning methods”, draw one’s attention to the gender inequalities in the officially sponsored family planning programme. The result of the survey showed that there were more female acceptors than against male acceptors of the above programme. The sex composition of living children showed that people prefer a male child to a female one. And this was the determining factor for acceptance of the family planning methods in the sample. The authors conclude that the programme should motivate men as much as they motivate women to go for family planning to make it effective in the true sense.

Berendrapal Singh Sehgal (1989) writes on “Law, Women and Population in India”, and highlighted on the issues of women and marriage, women and family planning, education, employment. He explores education influence on population and analyses interaction of employment and population growth. He proposes need to amend existing laws confirming with principles embodied in universal declaration of human rights, declaration of eliminating of discrimination against women.

Lal, Ajit (1998) focuses on “Abortion under the Indian Penal Code and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy act”. He provides the legal grounds for abortion, when, where and by whom the pregnancy can be terminated is also discussed. The author suggests that the Act should provide the medical practitioners with guidelines to decide what substantiate risk are to terminate
pregnancy and although the main objective of the Act is to maintain good health of the woman.

5. Health and well being

Mira Sadgopal, (1996) Edited a book entitled “My Body is Mine”, It portrays a process of self-help training experience in women’s health and deals with issues that adversely affect women’s health, such as class, caste and gender oppression in family and society, coercive medicalisation of health, social stereotyping issues related to gender sensitization, health and population, fertility awareness, ecological disorders and healing child-bearing support etc are also highlighted in this study.

Bhargavi. V. Davar, (2001) in her Edited book on “Mental health from a gender perspective,” made an effort to understand the politics of the mental health discoursed from gender perspective. This reviews the issues involving women and mental health in India-clinical psychology, the social and cultural ambience; the contributions and the limitations of the interested parties, with mental health issues related to body, reproduction and sexuality, sexual violence, child abuse and mental health and also inter-phase between gender and social institutions like hospital, court and media.

6. Feminist Movement

Radha Kumar, (1990). In her book on “The History of doing. An illustrated Account of Movements for Women’s Rights and Feminism in India”, notes the historical context of the movement and gives an account on the struggle of the radical thickness and social reformist, who first raised issues of women’s participation in freedom struggle and the emergence of the feminist movement as a process. The book reviews contemporary feminist movement and analysis the issues caused dowry death, rape case and practice
of sati. It is a brief, interpretative account on history of women's movement in India, both pre and post independence period.

Nivedita Menon. (1999). Edited work on “Gender and Politics in India”. This volume presents an overview of feminist theory and politics in India. It provides an outline of the issues involved and the importance in explaining the politics of gender in India. It focuses on different aspects of feminism in India, and debates on various issues like environment and gender, the impact of technological change on women work force. Interpreting constitutional different women’s movement and the challenges encountered and sexuality and gender. The problem of a contemporary theory of 'gender' in the perspective of present socio-cultural change in Indian society has been highlighted.

7. Gender Equality

Saroj Pandey (1996) in her work on “Curriculum and Gender Question”, explores the development of the curriculum in formal educational organizations from the point of view of gender equality, tracing back the historical antecedents. She comments on the pre-independence and post independence status of women's education, and discusses recommendations made by various committees formed for women's education after independence. She agrees that gender inequality still persists in a social form and stressed for sincere and sustained efforts to improve the status of women in India.

Mishra, Sweta, (1997) while commenting on “Women and 73rd constitutional Amendment Act: A Critical Appraisal”, briefed about the marginal position occupied by the Indian woman in the society and also in the political process due to socio-economic constraints. She then gives a brief account of the position of women in the PRIs before the 73rd Constitutional
Amendment Act, and also examines the probable role of women in the context of the 73rd amendment Act. Whether women will be able to exercise political power through this system.

**Shashi S. Narayana (1988)**, in a work on “Gender equality through reservation in decision-making Bodies”, discusses the need for political empowerment of women for decision making in all legislative bodies. She highlighted on economic and socio-political maladies along with increasing violence against women in higher bodies of political authority, and stressed for the need of accountability and sense of commitment on the part of the elected women representatives. For this higher degree of awareness is required among the women with regard to health, literacy, gender and other relevant social, economic and political issues.

**Flavia Agnes (1999)**, in her study on “The Politics of Women’s Rights in India”, explores the issue of gender and law reform with reference to the politics and history in India. She also suggests the strategies, which could safeguard the women’s rights, which has a typical social, cultural and political background. By and large she highlights on need of empowering the women.

**Madhu Kishwar (1999)**. In her work on “Law and Gender inequality: The Politics of Women’s Rights in India, focused on gender inequality. Her writings are considering to women’s issues like the role of marriage payments and dowry, unwanted daughters, denial of inheritance and land rights to women, sexual harassment, identities, beauty contest etc. She attempted to grapple with challenges of Indian women and questioned as to why their problems remained unresolved. She also deals with moving away of ‘ism-driven’ politics and orthodox feminist thinking and appeals to people’s consciences to bring about any meaningful changes in the position of women.
Indira Jaising (2000). In her essays points out the emerging issues concerning validity of personal laws, women's representation etc which will engage the courts and it is felt that an increasing number of women in the judiciary will be able to perceive women as autonomous decision makers and active participants in public life.

Lori Mcdougall (2000) in her studies on "Gender gap in Literacy in Uttar Pradesh". Points out on gender differences in literacy attainment in Uttar Pradesh, 1951-91 reveals significant regional variations in female achievement and the gender gap. The study covers status of literacy in northern and eastern parts of the state and influence of religion, urbanization and income on literacy rate and emphasis of history, social relations' politics on the female literacy level and gender gap in state. The study illustrates low literacy rate of female in the nation.

Chatterji, Anjana, (1990) wrote on "Women in Search of Human Equality". This work attempts to situate women in the present context of national development, to assess their condition since the changes in their status. And study the link between economic progress and the class to which the woman belongs for studies has indicated that there is a close connection between the two. She identifies the problems in the path of women's equality and suggested the future possible solutions.

Sarkar, Lotika, (1998). In a report on "National Specialized Agencies and Women's equality", examines the role of the Law Commission of India (LCI) assesses its contribution to women's equality and identifies ways of improving. Socialized agencies like the LCI were recommended by the UN Commission of the Status of Women to play a multiple role in eliminating women's inequality. This deals with the genesis of the LCI its composition, status and
functioning which includes topics like, married women’s laws, related with Marriage, family and property in India.

8. Labour and employment

Rehana Sikri, Kanishka (1999) in her study on, “Women and Sexual Exploitation: Harassment at Work”, presents women’s occupational profile as well as the social mores and family values that determine behavioral patterns specifically in the workplace. The results of the survey are analyzed for further interpretation of the components of sexual harassment and male-female relationship in the workplace. Working women’s search for identity is also addressed in the context of the traditional pattern of gender and sexual exploitation. The book brings out the distinctive and alarming aspects of gender confrontation and its sociological significance.

Kishwar Madhu (1992). In her Case Studies from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu, on “Exploitation of Domestic Women workers” that are published in Social Action, Vol, 43 April-June (1993),pp 235-241. Explores on the problems of women in the unorganized domestic sectors in the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. The purpose of the study is to portray the exploitation of domestic women workers. She emphasis that the structure of the family affects exploitation directly as well as indirectly while stay with the employer results in direct exploitation. She also suggests that economic support and skill training to the women of the non-familial structure may enable them to be independent and self-reliant.

Nirmala Banerjee & Swasti Mitter (1998). In their work on "Women Making a Meaningful Choice- Technology and New Economic Order", mentioned on Indian working women’s response to technological changes and globalization and also to the impact of these changes on women’s work in India. They focus exclusively on demands, concerns and aspirations of Indian
working women with respect to technological changes as reflected in those commissioned reports. The study examines women of diverse background and their co-relation with changing technologies in the past and present in different regions and industries of the country. The paper further analyses the position of Indian Women's movement in context with women's traditional role in the society.

Neera Sehgal, (1987) while writing on, “Employment of /Women and reproductive hazards in work Places” examines exposure hazards of toxic substances on fertile. pregnant mothers, discriminatory exclusionary practices against women by employers to avoid legal, moral accountability Probes instances of transfers to low paid jobs. Self indicted sterilization, safety measures, foetal protection, medical screening, she also Examines employers responsibilities government role to protect the interacts of women under article 39(e) of the Indian constitution.

9. Marginalisation of Women

Martha Alter Chen (1998). (ed) on “Widows in India" Social Neglect and Public Action. This volume aimed at a better understanding of the status and condition of widows, as a marginalized group of Indian society”, she explores the ideological construction of widowhood in India including patriarchal constructs, the practice of levirate and property rights under customary and modern statutory law, also deal with the demographics of widowhood with reference to mortality and aging, property rights, social security employment and social identity based on case studies of actual practice and individual histories.

10. Violence Against Women

organizations in India have opposed individual acts of violence against women ranging from amniocenteses, female infanticide, rape, dowry deaths and sati, there has been little attention given to the theoretical understanding of the causes of violence. He discusses some recent Indian feminist theorizing of violence by activist leaders closely involved in movements of women as peasants, forest dwellers and members of the lower castes.

Ram Ahuja's (1998) in his excellent contribution on "Violence against Women", mentioned the causes of rise in violence against women, attempts to answer questions regarding the nature of causes for violence against women. He also deals with issue of trauma faced by victims of violence as they seek acceptance in a hostile environment. The book also offers suggestions regarding treatment of such issues through preventive measures redefining patriarchal norms, developing support for victims within the family and through women's organizations etc thus providing a balance between practical and theoretical issues.

"The Hindu", dated 10th Jan 1990, illustrated that in recent year, medically advanced diagnosing test on pregnant women i.e. amniocentesis has become common, in metropolitan cities and even in rural areas of northern states, which caused for abortion of female foetus. And considerable number of newborn girl children are killed by poisoning within day of their birth among kallar community at Usilampatti village in Madurai of TamilNadu.

P.D.Scott (1974) in his study "Fatal Battered Baby Cases" reveals about violation of girl children. Out of 29 cases he studied, shown that a father inhumanly killed girl child of 5 years old. Majorities of other cases that he interpreted girl children were facing precipitating treatment like crying refusal of food asking for unwillful favor. Certain times the father might not have liked the looks, colour of the skin and appearance of the girl child. It was also
found that all the fathers had very immature overaggressive personalities. Suffered from inferiority complex and nearly all showed difficulty in controlling themselves of coping with stress.

A study of Christine Cooper (1975) on “The Doctors Dilemma: A pediatricians view” in Franklin A while (Ed) child Abuse, Churchill Livingstone elucidates about violation of girl children’s rights. He studied 136 battered girl children. The death rate was 10 percent. In 30 percent cases there was permanent brain damage of the children. Maltreatment and rejection from their parents, severe discipline and resultant emotional breakdown of the girls were very common. A great majority suffered from extreme poverty. Some of the parents suffered from serious mental illness or inadequate personalities, many had they been violently treated and were neglected and unloved children.

S.R.Smith, P.Hanson and S.Nobel (1975): “Parents of Battered children: A Controlled Study”, concerning child abuse, reflected on violation of girl children. They highlighted that lower economic condition, severe personality disorder of parents, father’s criminal record and aggressive psychopath are responsible factors that influence rising violence against girl children.

Sturgess and Heal (1976) while studying on violation of rights of women, revealed that majority of children died of injury caused by their mothers or fathers. Parents having, criminal convictions are causative factors for violation of rights of girl children

Skinner and castle (1969) studied on 78 physically abused girl children. He found that there were more mother batterers than fathers. 47 percent of the parents of battered children were habitually aggressive and the rest could not sustain child-nurturing relationships due to their emotionally impoverished personalities.
Huggens and Straus (1980:51-67) observed that, if a man had conflict with his wife's stress and frustration aggravates and if he fails to physically assault his wife, he normally assaults his daughter, because she biologically and physically represents her mother.

Straus (1983) in his study on "physical violence on girl child", found that in 85 percent of the slum families parents assault their children, especially girl children because they know those chances of being prosecuted are almost nil.

Leelamma Devasia and V.V. Devasia (1992) in their writing on "Victimization of women in India, focused on violation of women’s rights. They specifically mentioned that violence on women in India is rooted in traditional discrimination and this discrimination is uncompromisingly resolved through enshrined and enforced fundamental rights of Indian constitution. The violation of women’s rights in their study is reflected through victimization of rape sati, dowry, and domestic violence.

The same authors in another study entitled "The girl child in India", (1991) assess on violence of girl child rights in India. They conveyed that physical punishment and physical violence naturally start in infancy with parental slaps to correct and teach as part of socialization.

N.L. Sao (1998) while writing on “ Human Rights violations: Remedial Measures” analyses that, despite all the safeguards and the machinery provided for their enforcement the number of cases of atrocities against the SC/STs have been increasing every year human rights violations take place against the Dalit, the focus is the victims for the only purpose of publicity in the media. He also mentioned the way of tackling those human rights activists, N.G.O's and the associations of Dalit employees must prepare them mentally, socially, and politically to resist the tortures by democratic means.
Rachana Kaushal (1996) in her study on "Women and Law In India has illustrated that despite massive legislation implemented for safe and secure of women's interest there is alarming increase in mental and physical violence against women. And the reasons for this are; high rate of illiteracy, poverty, and mental, physical and material insecurity amongst the women. She mentioned that various codes, bills and legislation are weak in providing physical, mental and material security to Indian women.

A.K.Tiwari (1999) in his study on "challenges to Human rights: An Insight in to Female Foeticide, Infanticide and child murder". He said, that foeticide, female infanticide were the result of imbalance of social equilibrium. Therefore there is dire need of curbing such menaces and for this he gave a call for human rights activists to make move in the matter.

Lina Gounsalves (2001) in her book on "Women and Human Rights" described the lack of awareness of human rights among women and that resulted in denying their equal rights. She highlighted on violence against women it's justification on cultural and religious grounds, and that they are not considered as criminal activity. This book focuses on the human rights concepts and enables women to rely and protect their rights of which they are unaware.

11. Girl Child

Mita Bhadra (1999) in her book, discussed the prevailing inequalities, discrimination against the girl child and her gender marginalisation. It presents information about the social status of the girl child in India, child labour and child prostitution. She also discussed the various laws enacted to secure the rights of the girl child in India. She highlighted the declining sex ratio, under nourishment, child marriage, female foeticide and the SAARC Plan of Action and the Government of India's initiative to improve the status
of girl children, gender stereotyping, prejudices, girl child abuses, situations under which the girl child is living, child marriage, which is rooted in tradition and illiteracy, and its impact on child labour and health. And deals with various laws with reference to girl child. The volume is promising to be valuable to social researchers as well as for planners and policy makers.

Dr.(Mrs.) Mohini Giri (1999) in her book on children prostitution deals with almost all relevant issues for prevention of child prostitution, to rescue and rehabilitation, awareness and social mobilization health care, housing and civic amenities, economic empowerment, legal reform, law enforcement trafficking and other human rights issues. It provides deep insight into the exploitation of women's human rights. The volume also makes valuable recommendations for improving the condition of girl child prostitutes, who mostly come from the most downtrodden section of Indian society. The recommendation laid great emphasis on the active involvement of voluntary social groups and local level administrative authorities as it recognizes the importance of public support for the effective implementation of any such social legislation.

Sreenath Lalitha, (1996) through her work on “Victimization of girl-child in the home”, commented that, Indian society is still plagued by victimization of girl child through performance of child marriage despite the Beijing Summit focusing on women’s right and the affirmation in the UN Declaration of 1989 to which India is a signatory. There is an urgent need for law reform to protect the status and rights of child brides in India. The author points out that the male-chauvinist traditions of patriarchal societies still hold sway over the minds of the judges in courts.

Bhadra Mita, (1999) in her book on “Girl Child in Indian Society”, analyzed the situation under which Indian girl children are living and
identifying the sexual inequalities within the household and society, she stressed that for the enhancement of status of girl child in India, change in trend is required in the areas of socialization process, gender stereotyping discrimination, age at marriage, girl child labour etc

Kishawar Madhu, (1995) Her book on “Where Daughters are Unwanted”, emphasizes the magnitude of the problem of sex determination tests (SDT) in India, which has resulted in sex selective abortions of thousands of female foetuses. But in spite of stringent provisions, due to lack of proper implementation, this law has failed to curb the problem. The real solution lies in making families to realize the value of their daughters, otherwise these SDT will never end.

12. Women and Urbanization

Mita Majumdar (1991) in her study on “Rural Women and Modernization” discussed the effect of modernization on the rural women. She states that the declining of status of the rural women is not because of technology alone. It is the result of combination of the forces in the form of illiteracy, caste and class barrier, low self-perception of women and the indifferent attitude of the Govt, towards women’s issues. She also emphasized that to increase the participation of women in agricultural development it is not enough to review the policy matters alone. They will be effective only when there will be social change in favour of women, particularly, those from the most marginalized classes.

Walter Fernandes, (1991) studied on “Urbanization, coping mechanism and slum women’s status” and remarked that women’s status in India is changing due to migration of poor rural women who join the urban informal sector. It is affirmed that migration alone does not add to the women’s status and may even result in their down word mobility. It is emphasized that an
educational approach aimed at the organization and attitudinal change is an essential condition for status change.

The review of the studies mentioned above, revealed that, since long, several social scientists have put up their efforts to assess the problems spreading around women and to study the trend of change in the position in Indian society. Infact scholars have referred to the level of accessing human rights by women and its relation to their empowerment. However women's rights relating to marriage, family, reproductive, education and other social and economic rights, political rights etc. are rarely addressed to by the Scholars. This was deeply felt by the researcher; hence it has assumed importance of taking the present study. The present research specifically makes some efforts to fill the gap by studying the interrelationship between the level of access of human rights by women and their degree of empowerment.

About the study

During the last several years many social scientists in India have been devoting much of their time in assessing the role and status of women in family and society, both in theoretical and practical approach. But no such specific study has been conducted to evaluate the awareness and access of rights particularly among the rural women. Their rights are knowingly or unknowingly violated, the statutory norms relating to women are avoided. The present study has therefore been designed to investigate the status of women, problems and predicaments so as to reveal the level of awareness and degree of accessing of their rights, given by the legal and social norms of the society.

In Indian social system, the role and status of a person is being determined by birth on the basis of gender. However, the actual role behavior may be different from the ideal behavior. The established role behavior depends upon how the individual himself/herself perceives his/her role, the
situation in which he/she performs the roles, as well as the role behavior of other persons in the situation. Thus role perception and role performance are interrelated. These in turn bring into focus the rights sanctioned and the opportunities provided by the state as well as the socio-cultural institutions in the society that may not necessarily reinforce each other. The actual role performance therefore, has to be viewed with reference to existing sanctioned rights as well as prevalent social values and norms.

It will be an agreeable fact that the process of women empowerment through accessing human rights needs to be evaluated in the contemporary socio-economic situation prevailing in the country. Hence the present study finds more relevance and assumes a place in the saga of sociological literature as it relates to the understanding of the process of accessing human rights by women which leads to their empowerment in all dimensions.