CHAPTER - IV

STATUS OF WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT MOVEMENT IN INDIA
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4.1. INTRODUCTION:

It is customary everywhere to classify the human community on the basis of sex into groups of ‘men’ and ‘women’. The biological fact of sex has created much difference between them. The aims and objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress, styles and behavioral patterns, roles and status of men and women are different. Nowhere in the history of humanity men and women were treated alike. Women have not been able to lead a life exactly on par with men in spite of their urge for equality. This does not mean that men and women represent two different cultures as such. They represent one way of life, one culture and one heritage. This is also true of India and Indian women. The type of the status assigned to women in any society reflect the nature of its cultural richness and the level of its civilization standards.

Hence, Swamy Vivekananda said “that country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever in future”. The degree of freedom and respect given to women move about and take part in public activities gives a good idea of the nature of the society to which they belong.

Women in ancient India, particularly during the vedic period enjoyed a position which was on the whole much more satisfactory than in the later periods. Women underwent almost a kind of servitude during the medieval period and their position went improving during the British period and after independence. Today Indian women are almost assigned an equal status with men. All their political, economic and educational and other disabilities have been removed legally. This does not, however mean that Indian women are completely free from problems. They have their own problems.
4.2. STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

The status accorded to women in society symbolizes its level of progress. The spirit of civilization can be assessed by the way in which women are treated by the members of that civilization. Study of the history of human society reveals that in no society of the world women enjoyed absolute equality on par with men. Every where they were subject to inequality, discrimination and exploitation. In some societies their position has been comparatively better than their counterpart in some other societies. Even in the same society the status accorded to women has never been the same all through. It has been changing in keeping with the changes in the general conditions of the society.

The status of women in India has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes exploitation of women to a greater extent was reduced.

More freedom and better orientation were provided to women’s organizations to pursue their interests. Importance of researches, national policies and programs focused on women came to be increasingly realized. Several commissions were appointed by the central and state governments to study the causes of low status of women and to protect their rights in various fields. The celebration of International Women’s Year in 1975 and the activities of UNESCO also created awareness of the problems of women.

Women constitute 50% of the world’s population and one third of the formal labor force. More than half of all women are still engaged in agriculture in the developing world. In India 86% of rural women workers are involved in agriculture compared with 74% of rural male workers. It is now being realized that excluding women from taking part in the development process is to ignore half of the needs, aspirations and potentiality of humanity.
Any development model explicitly or implicitly excluding women would face likely failure. Along with this growing realization constant emphasis has been laid on the development of mechanism that could contribute to the advancement of those women living hitherto in a poverty stricken society, tough and backward rural life.

The discourse on gender and development is at a significant phase in its evolution now. Thanks to the spread and strengthening of the neoliberal economic agenda across the developing world. Liberalization affects women's participation in markets both in terms of productive and reproductive activities. There is close scrutiny of the gender and development interventions.

The status of women is understood in terms of the extent to which women have control over their own lives and have access to knowledge, economic resources and political power. In determining the status of women, factors such as the role of women in decision making in the family and in the community their educational status, their participation in social, political and economic activities and their position in the various professions as well as their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance etc., should be taken into consideration.

No civilized government of any nation can afford to ignore the development and welfare of women who constitute almost 50% of its total population. Of the total population of India, 1,027 million as per 2001 census, women numbered 495.73 million. The development of women has always been the central focus in developmental planning since independence. Community development as defined by the United Nations is a process of change by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of their communities to integrate them into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. The role of women in the field of development of a community is highly recognized.
The importance of women empowerment as a tool to alleviate poverty and to bring down the income disparities is the need of the hour as the international agencies like UNO and other organizations have laid stress on distributive justice rather than just the growth of per capita income.

The constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women. It does not make any discrimination on the grounds of sex. Indian women are also responding positively to the changed socio-economic and political situation. However, our women are not completely free from problems. On the contrary a number of problems are haunting upon them. These problems are analyzed from different socio-economic contexts.

Problem of violence against women is universal and women are becoming victims of violence leading to increasing crimes against women. Exploitation and harassment of women is common. They have number of health problems, discrimination of girl child education, leading to illiteracy, problem of unemployment, poverty etc,. All these problems need to be understood in terms of disempowerment or pawnness of women which are general and women in specific.

The general sources of disempowerment can decide the pawn ness or disempowerment superficially, while women specific sources will clearly specify the reasons of disempowerment of rural women as a whole. Several or a few of the sources may be affecting in an area however, their degree varies with the place and time.

Social context: Illiteracy, social isolation, caste system, and dependence on elite section, money lenders and intermediaries form the general sources of pawnness .However specific sources include subordination to male members due to patriarchal system, vulnerability, gender violence, gender repression, lack of information, dowry, divorce or dissertation etc,.
Economic context: Low wages, lower or no asset base, limited access to the resource and credit, inability in marketing the produce etc., are the general economic sources of pawnness. The women specific sources include discrimination in wages, male dominated policies and gender stratified market jobs, limited bargaining power and gender exploitation.

4.3. EMPOWERMENT MOVEMENT IN INDIA THROUGH WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS:

The role of the State and institutions, actors of civil society, voluntary organizations, academicians, social activists and many more is remarkable in the Indian Women's Movement to make sure that women are empowered and autonomous to perform the tasks of their own choice. The women's movement in India has been essentially a voluntary effort initiated, organized and directed by NGOs.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

There are several social evils in our society directly affecting the lives of million and millions of women from time immemorial. The empowerment movement is of a recent origin. For the first time in 19th century, the women empowerment movement started under the auspices of Bramha Samaj, a ladies Association was founded in Calcutta [now kolkotha ] in 1886 by Swarna Kumar Devi with the object of friendly relation and spirit of service among Indian Women. It also provided training to poor girls to become teachers. Another organization Sharada Sadan meant to provide education and employment for women was founded by pandit Ramabai in Poona 1892. Seva Sadan an organization with an objective of imparting education and training to women was formed by Ramabai Ranade at Poona in 1909. The status of women was an issue of great concern to nineteenth century reformers in India. The first efforts were directed against certain customs like sati, female infanticide and prohibition of widow remarriage, seen as detrimental to the status of women. Later they tried to educate women with a view to bring them in to public life.
By the first decade of the twentieth century, a few Indian women were convinced that they needed an all India women’s organization run by women to deal with women’s problems. Between 1910 and 1920 a number of social organizations for women grew rapidly, called by various names, Mahila samithis, Women’s clubs and Ladies societies. They emerged in the cities and towns of British India and the native States. Bharat Stree Maha Mandal, founded by Sarala Devi Chowdharani in 1910 dealt with women problems. An integrated approach to women and child welfare came with the formation of two organizations in the early 20th century, a) Chimanbai Maternity and child welfare league was set up in Baroda in 1914 by Saroja Nalini and b) Bhagini Samaja started at Poona in 1916 by Saroja Nalini. The activities of these organizations were centered on three fronts 1] health, 2] education, 3] employment.

Modern Western Movement of women’s rights, especially the one that developed later in half of 19th century and first half of 20th century demanded “votes for women”. Three National women’s organizations in the country voicing women’s demand for vote began between 1917 and 1927. These organizations were Women’s Indian Association [WIA], National conference for women in India [NCWI] and All India Women’s conference [AIWC] set up in 1917, 1925 and 1926 respectively had developed branches all over India. Based mainly among the educated elite women, these organizations claimed the authority to speak for women in India. It was accepted by colonial government as the spokesperson for women.

Women’s Indian Association, [WIA] the first All India organization of women was founded at Madras in 1917 [now Chennai] by Mrs. Dorothy Jinaradasa, a social worker. Even foreigners like Mrs. M. Cousins and Dr. Anne Besant were associated with it later. The Association showed an apparently international color through maintenance of links with various organizations by establishing financial and other support.
WIA became the parent of AIWC in 1927, when AIWC was formed, the NCWI was formed as a branch of the international council of women in 1925.

Various social welfare organizations came into existence promoting the cause of women and thus linking together women all over India. The major step in the linking process was the inception of AIWC which brought women on a common platform. Incidentally the first conference was organized in Poona in 1927 and the representatives of 20 branches all over India participated in it. Today there are as many as 102 branches and AIWC has a total membership of more than hundred thousand women from all walks of life. The main objectives of AIWC is to work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help women utilize to the fullest the fundamental rights conferred on them by the constitution of Indian Union. The main objective of National Federation of Indian Women [NFIW] is to work for complete emancipation of Indian women, [social, economic cultural and political]based on equality of rights between men and women, and full social justice, physical, intellectual, moral, artistic and educational wellbeing. The other objective of NFIW is the security of children and protection of rights of mothers and ensure a happy motherhood for all women. Both AIWC AND NFIW are well organized and there by playing an indispensable role in the emancipation of women.

**MAHILA DAKSHATHA SAMITHI [MDS]** ;- Is a women's vigilance committee which works to fight against corruption, injustice, and social evils affecting women. It has been functioning since 1977through its three wings namely, a] consumer protection cell, b]Anti-dowry and protection of women's cell and c]status of women cell. It fights against all kinds of exploitation and atrocities against women. Its object is to an awareness of their political, social, and economic rights among women, particularly those of poorer classes and inculcates in them a spirit of self reliance and independence.
SAHELU: - Was another organization started in August 1981. Sahelu means friend which connotes sorority rather than fraternity. “All Women are Equal” in this organization. In April 1983 sahelu was recognized as a society. It is a voluntary organization. The organizers felt the need for women’s centers, a place where women meet other women share their experiences and collectively workout solutions to their problems.

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TRUST: [ISST]

ISST is a voluntary research organization that was founded in 1964. In 1980 it has become a trust. It identifies areas of research which would empower the women’s movement with a strong information base and alternative strategies for a united action. It also directly offers services to women’s organizations particularly to those working for self employed women. The focus is on the poorest women and their families.

SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION: [SEWA]

SEWA is basically a trade union of self employed women whose activities fall under three broad categories namely, hawkers, vendors home based workers, manual labor and service providers. SEWA considers itself as both an organization and a movement working towards full employment, self reliance and empowerment of women. SEWA works for the welfare of its members mainly by trying to improve their bargaining strength in the market and providing them with other help and supportive services in the form of skill building, marketing, credit, health, legal aid etc.,

The activities of SEWA are spread over nine districts of Gujarat including Kheda.; SEWA’s experiment is also being replicated in a few other States of India. An important wing of SEWA is its co-operative bank popularly known as SEWA BANK. The main aim of the bank is provide savings and credit facilities to the members of SEWA and in turn help them in taking up livelihood promotion activities.
The bank's jurisdiction though confined to Ahmedabad city, is now being expanded to rural areas of Ahmedabad and Kheda district through Self Help Groups.

**MANUSHI:**

It is rendering a valuable service to the women issue through a powerful magazine. Manushi has gained international recognition and is speaking about the feminist movement. Manushi has gone all the way out to educate and reeducate about their rights.

**4.3.1 EMPOWERMENT INITIATED BY ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS:**

There are several women's organizations and social welfare organizations promoting the cause of women and linking together women all over India. From time to time these organizations announce different programs. For example, All India Women's conference [AIWC] organizes conferences relating to women problems. AIWC has been participating in several international conferences over the years. The program of AIWC are mainly welfare and service oriented. To mention a few- establishing working girl's hostel, balwadies, promotion of small savings, handicrafts, sewing centers, free medical aid, mobile health centers, fair price shops, school for the blind, Condensed courses of women for Secondary School Leaving Certificate examinations adult education centers etc.,

Special mention may be made of a] Vocational training in hand printing and textile printing which is imparted for the poor and needy women for a period of six months to enable them to earn their livelihood else where at such centers. b] Free legal aid is given to the families who can not afford to arrange for a lawyer on their own. c] Facilitating lectures, meetings, debates on events of national importance such as women's day, etc.,
The Institute of Social Studies Trust [ISST] runs a small reading room and documentation center called, ‘JIGYASA’ as a first step towards setting up an information ‘network’ service covering Women’s Studies or women’s development.

ISST canvases its findings and views through the publication of books and papers, articles in journals and newspapers and also intensive participation in national and international forum and seminars. Between 1975 to 1982 the institute has published 10 books of case studies, contributed 20 papers and 60 to 80 memoranda to both government agencies as well as committees set up for advancing the cause of women.

SEWA is another organization which gave women better strength to demand better wages, unity and protection against individual’s exploitation, SEWA has around 14000 women workers who are home based producers, vendors of vegetables, fruits and as manual workers selling their labor as head loaders and hand cart pullers. SEWA gave them the dignity, a feeling of “SELF EMPLOYED”.

Today, bank finance is made available by SEWA to the poorest members and thus it helps them to come out of the grip of money lenders. It took years to persistent lobbying by SEWA organizers to change the definition of the term ‘worker’ to include self employed women. The planning commission added separate chapter on the self employed in the draft of the Sixth Five Year Plan. Recently SEWA sponsored several meetings of representatives of various organizations and presented its recommendations to the planning commission to cover basic demands of the women employed in unorganized sector.

THE MANUSHI magazine which is a radical one establishes a sort of link between society and women. It organized classes, lectures, and meetings for rural and urban poor women. A number of posters, slides and books have been prepared to teach them.
The publishers of Manushi are trying to introduce women studies in the universities in social science curriculum. Socialization of female child, sex biased text books, co-education and educational institutions are within the purview of its research areas along with struggle against blind faith, personal laws and fundamentalism. A research project on exploitation of women in the name of religion was undertaken. It is also conducting camps and classes to train gross root workers. Workshops on legal literacy movement are very common. The data generated by various governments non-government organizations on socio economic conditions of women and formulation of working groups on women issues in government has led the publication of the report of the committee on status of women towards equality, declaration of the international women year and the U.N. decade of women. This has an appreciable focus on women development in government run programs. For the first time the Sixth Five Year Plan included a chapter on “WOMEN DEVELOPMENT”. Government of India now has a variety of programs aiming at women development. The thrust of these programs or schemes many of which were initiated during the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans is to provide...

A] Employment and Income Generating Services,

B] Education and Training Services,

C] Support Services,

D] General Awareness Services,

E] Legal Support Services.

There are 27 beneficiary oriented schemes for women, identified by the Prime Minister's Office. There are 48 training schemes for women under different ministries and departments. The Department of Women and Child Development [DWCD] which was set up in 1985, has the nodal responsibility or co-coordinating and monitoring programs for the development of women under different ministries and departments.
The Women’s Development division set up at the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child development in 1986 provides Technical Support to the Women’s Bureau of the department of women and child development by the way of training, research, documentation etc.

There are approximately 82 schemes for the development of women. These schemes fall under the four broad categories;

A] Economic Development [general/vocational/specific training]

B] Welfare

C] Public goods/services [educational, health, nutrition, supportive services]

D] Awareness.

The Government and other public authorities have thus chalked out a number of programs for the welfare and empowerment of women. They have been implemented through a large network of organizations. However, in order to create visible impact there should be clear co-ordination between government programs on the one hand and those chalked out by women’s organizations on the other. The women’s organizations claim that the upliftment of women through empowerment is essential to the national cause because women are the mothers of future generations.

The need to alleviate the struggles in the lives of ‘working poor’, the “Working Women Forum” [WWF] was created as a social movement for organizing and mobilizing women on trade lines. After prolonged consultations and learning from them about their needs and priorities the working women’s forum was launched in the poorer house holds in 1978.
Realizing the conditions of squalor, the founders of this poor women’s movement prioritized relief from poverty- hunger, starvation, indebtedness and the imminent need to strengthen poor women’s productive roles. Women, in turn, expressed their need for low borrowing cost and easy access to credit.

The main objectives of Working Women’s Forum [WWF] are:

1] Organize women workers on trade lines and create visibility.

2] Devise innovative organizational structure enabling poor women’s participation at all levels.

3] Reach out to large numbers of women workers within a short time span.

4] Remain ‘women intensive’ in nature and address the struggles of poor women workers against class, caste and gender in the community and work place.


As an organization of very poor women WWF’s propelling forces despite being poor and illiterate brought in to the organizational fold more and more poor women. Founded with 800 women in 1978 its membership started swelling rapidly. Indo-German Society New Delhi gave a grant of Rs 25,000/- to WWF in 1979. This accelerated rapid mobilization. 2500 members of WWF with a share capital of Rs20/- each and a seed capital of Rs 50,000/- along with a grant of $2500 from Appropriate Technology Internationally formed working women’s co-operative society [WWCS] in 1981. This was an informal and easy way to operate banking system.
Ford Foundation, UNICEF, assisted WWF in the early days, in 1987; Government of Netherlands began its partnership with WWF and continued to strengthen this poor women's movement. The leadership generated from the gross roots was tremendous and solved most of the organizational problems. Functioning in a small room of school's dilapidated building WWF's cadres unmindful of restrictions on the available infrastructure were busy expanding their out reach in to a mass social movement. As WWF evolved in to an anticipatory poor women's movement, it provided scope for several other institutions to participate in this dynamic process. In 1981 Government of India worked in partnership with WWF to promote health and family planning awareness among poor women workers. In 1990 looking at the success of the initiative of gross root women, United Nations Population Fund [UNPF] also entered in to partnership with WWF. WWF has now grown in to one of the largest credit co-operative net work in the country with a recovery of 97% and cumulative disbursement of 396.6 million rupees. Unleashing an empowerment process at the gross roots, WWF has emancipated women from class exploitation, caste inferiority, physical weakness, male dominance and brought poor women out of their closed doors.

An interesting feature that has emerged over the past two decades is that women have moved from trading and vending occupations to more skilled production and manufacturing business

1] 96% of the women have saved their profits in live stocks, gold and poultry etc.,

2] 69% own household necessities,

3] 76% have been relieved from indebtedness;

4] 92% of them were able to have two square meals a day,

5] 40% of them had diversified their activities and started new business.
6] 80% of 5-9 year members of WWF have made improvements in housing including, electricity, drinking water and toilets.

WWF is a unique success formula to support poor women, who in turn fully support WWF and give it its strength and vitality to sustain and expand in creating an accumulation at the base. Today, WWF is 80% operationally self sufficient and 75% financially sufficient. The fact that WWF has a local orientation, self management, solidarity, autonomy, innovative and sense of ownership being high contributions to its long term sustainability. In the WWF's experiments one of the manifestations of human development is the improvement in the physical quality of life of poor women and their families.

The development strategy resulted in the emergence of socio and economic advocacy platform giving way for the “UNHEARD BEING HEARD taking in to account women’s roles and needs. The gross root development strategy resulting in collective action, improved articulation, generated power to overcome obstacles towards better economic and social status. Group action is a social security system which enables good repayment and pooling of scarce resources for maximum utilization. It also provides a better business opportunities, creating a sense of solidarity and a desire to change existing social conditions and relieves them from pressures of caste, and other social exclusions.

ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTARY ACTION AND SERVICES [AVAS]:

The Association for Voluntary Action and Services was established by a group of like minded people and individuals. This group includes professionals and social activists who had a burning desire to extend themselves and share their concerns in a ‘learn and act together’ environment. The initial movement of AWAS comprising a couple of slum communities brought to the fore a multitude of problems faced by slum dwellers.
AWAS took up its issues and struggles with State and National movements like Karnataka Kolageri Nivasigala Samyukta Sanghatane [KKNSS] and women's voice to achieve its goals. The gender realities of today's society where the living and working conditions are shaped by social norms that treat women and men differently, where the inequalities are bracingly obvious and attitudes of powers are highly gender insensitive. It became imperative for AVAS to focus on activating women for sustainable solutions.

Ensuring women's participation in all its work, redefining their roles in decision making process and empowering them through macro linkages and exposure has been the main stay of 'AVAS's success in its shelter programs. Therefore right from conception of a shelter project through its implementation in to final management, the women have been in the forefront. In those projects which have been completed, with families moving in and living in new homes, with new address no longer spell out the word 'slum' but refer it to as a "LAYOUT" The women not only head the local community committees but also have been nominated in to neighborhood peace and justice committees, education forums etc.,

An important understanding derived by AVAS through its shelter projects is that the poor especially the women in slums have constantly proven to be productive, responsible citizens struggling hard to keep the wheels of the urban economy moving efficiently and their contribution to the city far outweighs the services accessed or utilized by them. An important aspect of AVAS work includes harnessing youth power especially equipping adolescent girls to become leaders in their communities. A net working of these girls from different slums of the city has helped widen the scope of empowerment process.

The women empowerment movement has attempted to structure itself around its values for a society. Since women have been placed in a largely powerless role in society, they are especially sensitive to the degradation associated with powerlessness.
Therefore in seeking change, the movement has sought organizational techniques that do not subject women to oppression. The thrust of women welfare programs under the Five Year Plans has been to make provisions for grant-in-aid to women's organizations. The scheme of training women in distress, for rehabilitation formed an important activity of the department of social welfare. This envisages payment of financial assistance to poor women for undergoing vocational training in commercial subjects.

A scheme of giving recurring grant-in-aid for employment generating projects undertaken by voluntary organizations of women was introduced in 1980-81. There are new Balmandirs in every State for the care and protection of poor and destitute women. Small work units like tailoring centers have been run successfully in some of these institutions. Public authorities are the major sponsors of welfare schemes in which the political organizations of women are engaged. Besides such linkages of women organizations contribute substantially to their economic strength, which among adds to their organizational strength. In India too, the year 1975 witnessed a sudden development in the activities of women's issues. The positive impact of the second wave of the feminism was evident at all levels of the government, local, provincial and central. A large number of committees, commissions & individuals were appointed to look into the injustice against women. Various measures were adopted to improve the status of women and laws were passed to remove discriminatory practices.

The Department of Social Welfare was created in 1976 at the centre. This was followed by the establishment of Department of Women and Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resources Development at the Central Government in 1985. Various action plans were prepared by these departments from time to time to improve the status of women. Women thus, entered national agenda. Steps were taken to integrate them into socio-economic development of the nation.
Women were appointed to higher national positions in public sector boards, courts and commissions etc., More women have been taking part in politics at all levels. The number of women in Lok Sahba has increased from 22 in 1952 to 39 in 1991 and to 59 in 2009. Women representatives have increased even in Rajya Sabha from 15 in 1952 to 24 in 1990. In India number of laws were passed which are gender specific such as Equal Remuneration Act 1971, ensuring women with equal pay at the work place etc., There are thousands of women institutions and organizations, which are busy with activities for women’s welfare and development. They create a common platform for common women and for common cause. An awareness of human rights and democratic freedom is being created. Women are becoming legal and right conscious. Now cruelty and injustice are not being tolerated as they were previously. Women have started coming out side their homes seeking justice and there is an indirect threat to the male dominated society that any injustice to women will not be tolerated in future.

4.4. WOMEN AND FIVE YEAR PLANS:

The concept of women’s development in the First Five Year Plan [1951-1956] was mainly welfare oriented. The Central Social Welfare Board [CSWB] set up in 1953 undertook a number of welfare measures through voluntary sectors.

In the Second Five Year Plan [1956-1961] women were organized in to mahila mandals to act as focal points at the gross root levels for the development of women.

The Third and Fourth and other interim Plans [1961-1974] accorded high priority to education of women. Measures to improve maternal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children and nursing and expectant mothers were also introduced.
In Fifth Plan [1974-1978] there was a shift in approach for women’s development from welfare to development. The new approach aimed at an integration of welfare with developmental services.

The Sixth Five Year Plan [1980-1985] was a landmark in the history of women’s development as it received recognition as one of the development sectors and was included in the Sixth Plan Document as separate chapter for the first time in the history of developmental planning. The Sixth Plan adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a three thronged thrust on health, education and employment.

In the Seventh Five Year Plan [1985-1990] the developmental programs for women continued with the major objectives of raising their economic and social status to bring them in to the main stream of National Development. A significant step in this direction was to identify / promote the beneficiary oriented programs for women in different developmental sectors which extend direct benefits to women.

The Eighth Five Year Plan [1992-1997] which was launched in 1992 promises to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programs will be implemented to complement the gender development programs. Therefore the flow of benefits to women in the three core sectors of education, health and employment will be monitored with a great vigil. Women must be enabled to function as equal partners and participants in the development process.

This approach to the Eighth Plan marks a further shift from development to empowerment of women. In order to meet both the increasing and challenging needs of women and children, there has been a progressive increase in the plan outlay over the period of last four developmental decades. The outlays of Rs 4 crores in the First Plan [1951-1956] has gone up to Rs 2000 crores in the Eighth Five Year Plan [1992-1997].
“Empowerment of women” as agents of socio economic change and development became one of the nine specific objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan [1997-2002]. The plan envisaged primarily to ensure that benefits flow to women from all general development sectors and emphasized on…….

A] Reservation of not less the 1/3rd seats for women in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.

B] Convergence of existing services, resources, infrastructure and man power in women specific and women related sectors.

C] Adoption of special strategies of Women Component Plan [WCP] to ensure that not less than 30% of funds/benefits flow to women from other developmental sectors.

D] Organizing Women Self Help Groups as major process of empowering women.

E] High priority to reproductive child health care.

F] Universalizing ongoing supplementary feeding program.

G] Ensuring easy and equal access to education for women and girls.

H] Elimination of gender bias in all educational programs.

I] Free education for girls up to college level including professional course.

J] Promoting skill development amongst women in modern upcoming trades etc.,

Some special initiatives taken during Ninth Plan include launching of an externally aided scheme of SWA-SHAHTI [1998] for socio-economic empowerment of women through self reliant self help groups, instituting stree shakier puraskars [1999].
A task force was setup under the chairmanship of deputy chairman Planning Commission to review existing women specific and women related legislations [2000], adoption of National Policy for Empowerment of Women [2001], celebration of the year 2001 as "WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT YEAR", recasting of Indira Mahila Yojana [IMY] as Swayam Siddha [2001], launching Swa-adhar [2001] to extend rehabilitation services for women in difficult circumstances etc.,

The Tenth Five Year Plan continued "EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN" as agents of social change and development. Towards this, a specific sector of three fold strategy was adopted based on National Policy for empowerment of women,[2001].

The National Policy on women 2001 articulated a series of goals towards women's empowerment. The objectives of this policy include...

1] Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

2] The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

3] Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

4] Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.,

5] Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

6] Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

8] Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

9] Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations

In the context of the preparations of 11th Five Year Plan[2007-2012] the Planning Commission constituted a steering committee on the empowerment of women and development of children, under the chairmanship of Dr. Syeda Hameed with a view to carry out a review analysis and evaluation of the existing provisions / programs for women and make recommendations. The working group was further divided in to following sub groups....

1] Engendering policies and strategies. 2] Violence against women. 3] Schemes of empowerment, advocacy, awareness generation and support services for women. The Eleventh Plan approach to gender equity has the following key elements....

1] Women are not recognized as a homogenous category for planned interventions. Since they belong to diverse castes, classes, communities and economic groups they can alone determine the success of planned interventions.

2] The recognition that only inclusive development of all categories of women can ensure holistic national development towards the millennium development goals.

3] The recognition that both inter-sectoral convergence as well as targeted exclusive women focused planning are necessary to achieve inclusive development towards the social, economic and political empowerment of women.
4] The recognition that for interventions in favor of women to have a sustained, long term incremental impact beyond individual Five Year Plan periods. They have four pronged objectives; A] to provide women with basic entitlements such as food security, health and education.

   B] to address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment and main streaming women in new and emerging areas of the economy.

   C] ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women-physical, economic, social and psychological.

   D] ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in parliament and assemblies.

5] The recognition that permanent institutional mechanisms, such as a women's knowledge commission or alternatively a permanent standing committee on gender with 50% participation of civil society gender experts must be put in place. This must include women's participation experiences, capacities and knowledge in to the process of development planning, formulation and administration across all sectors. There must be mandatory representation of qualified women in all planning commission steering committees.