Chapter – I

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.”

1.1 Background

Woman was created as a companion for man. The first woman Eve was made from Adam’s ribs not from his head to rule him or from his feet to serve him but from his side to walk with him as his equal, but what do we see today? We see woman as a second-class citizen. We often see them hopeless, destitute, wronged only because this world has stopped giving importance to the woman. Now let us the importance of woman in our society. She has been the torchbearer for centuries. She is responsible for the miracle of birth. In most cases she is also a provider of the family and the epitome and embodiment of morality. Woman is also responsible for the image of the society. It is the woman who is considered the guardian of the respect and honor of a family. Moreover God has already emancipated woman for no responsibility can be greater than that of continuing the cycle of life of birth. She is a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife. These are multiple
role that woman elegantly fits, but she is, in our so-called modern world, still living in chains!!

Woman is also serving the country by being teachers, professors, lecturers, by being guideline for students who soon turn out be like Quaid-e-Azam, Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan, Einstein, and Graham Bell. Moreover women are leaders we encountered tend to be highly verbal, speak with ease and more importantly, listen with ease and I think that they are quite capable to do this job like Margaret Thatcher, Queen Elizabeth, Hilary Clinton and of course Benazir Bhutto who was the first woman prime minister. She is working day and night only to make peace in the country, she is fighting for justice, she is sacrificing her life only for the sake of mankind yet she has no importance.

Don’t you think that she is also helping to strengthen the world’s economy? Don’t you that she is also helping to build a nation. The half of population consists of women. She is a doctor, an engineer, a business woman, an architect, an author. Woman is also in media. She is everywhere and as Barack Hussain Obama says:

“She was the cornerstone of our family and a woman of extraordinary accomplishment, strength and humility. She was the person who encouraged and allowed us to take chance”

I am a pessimist. I have a glass that is half empty. Why so? Because I have eyes that can see the injustice done with the women. I have ears that can hear the cries of the women being victimized. Women have been faced with misogyny since time immemorial. It is hard to believe that there is actually a term that defines a political ideology justifying and maintaining the subordination of women by men.
We should promise ourselves that we will never deny woman their rights, we will never discriminate her as she is so weak, so feeble to stand for her rights. In the end I would say:

Every tear that sheds from an eye,
Every drop of blood that has fallen to the ground,
Every scream of woman that goes unheard in the night,
Every sigh that escapes the lips of the woman,
Every soul that is destroyed,
Shouts out:
Enough! I am a woman respect me enough!

The roles of women in society have been greatly overseen in the last few decades but now are coming to a more perspective to people. In the early days women were seen as wives who were intended to cook, clean, and take care of the kids. They were not allowed to vote while men took care of having jobs and paying any bills that had to be paid. Soon enough it caught on that women should have a bigger role than what other people thought women should have. Women would have strikes and go on marches to prove that they should have rights just like everyone else. They faced discrimination like and other race that faced it. Women would voice their opinion in any way possible so that they could reach their goal.

The role of women in society is constantly questioned and for centuries women have struggled to find their place in a world that is predominantly male oriented. Literature provides a window into the lives, thoughts and actions of women during certain periods of time in a fictitious form, yet often truthful in many ways. Ernest Hemmingway's "Hills like White Elephants", D.H. Lawrence's "The Horse Dealers Daughter" and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" each paint a picture of a woman who has failed to break away from her male companion, all describing a stereotypically dominated woman. Through submissive natures, compliant attitudes, and
shattered egos the three women each struggle to live their lives in accordance to men, using only silent means of escape.

In Hemingway's "Hills like white elephants" we are introduced to Jig. Jig is a woman who lacks the ability to make decisions without constant approval and recognition from a man who has impregnated her but who would rather she aborts the baby. Jig, unfortunately, cannot make decisions on her own, which is exemplified throughout the story, depicting her weak and dependent personality. "What should we drink?" From the opening line of the story we are introduced to a character that questions rather than acts. Someone who is unsure of not only herself but the relationship she is involved in. Though a simple question about what beverage to order can often appears courteous, this is only the first of many examples pertaining to Jig's inability to live her life as an individual. Later she questions her purpose in life, "That's all we do isn't it-look at things and try new drinks?" asking her companion to confirm for her what the meaning of her life is? By doing this Hemingway succeeded in creating a character who cannot be respected but is instead pitied. In a discussion, with her American lover, Jig comments about the hills surrounding them, comparing them to white elephants, only for him to tell her that what...

It is obvious that no society can achieve its maximum strength unless each individual makes his or her maximum contribution. There is one group which exhibits feelings of disenfranchisement in every region of the world — and that is women. Women all over the world feel that they are second-rate and that only men can reach their full potential. This discrimination begins while the baby is still in the womb, so that a female baby is often considered of less value and the pregnancy terminated. This discrimination continues throughout the life of a woman. This discrimination is confirmed by tradition, by educational institutions, by the legal system, within the family, and, sadly, even by religion in many cases. As a result, women are often at
a disadvantage in terms of education, job opportunities, and economically.

1.2 Women's and the Question of Women’s Rights India: An Overview

The women’s movement in India emerged during the 1920s. The political and economic changes that had taken place in the 19th century forced the reformers to reassess the status of women and bring about some changes by advocating women's education and rising the age of marriage. The linkage between social reform, the status of women and the national movement was a major source of numerical strength for the national movement, and political support for the women’s movement. This linkage further strengthened the struggle against colonialism. The Women’s Indian Association Report of 1933 reveals that the Simon Commission viewed the Indian women’s movement as the possible ‘key of progress’ for an India free of communalism (Lateef, 1990:87).

By 1921, women had won the right to be elected to central and state legislatures, although women’s status as voters depended upon their husband’s property. From the early 19th century, the status of women became an issue of concern for male upper-caste and upper-class Hindu reformers. Their early efforts were directed against certain customs such as sati and the sanctions against widow re-marriage which were detrimental to the status of women. Later, they tried to educate women and bring them into public life. In south India the campaign was on to suppress the devdasi (temple prostitution) system. However, Indian men who encouraged female education and the formation of social organization did not relish hearing women speak about the evils of patriarchy. Franchise and civil rights were ideal issues for women to pursue since these discussions amongst them could take place without reference to sensitive social or cultural matters (Forbes 1998:93).
By the second decade of the 20th century, reform efforts were not exclusively confined to men; several all-India level women’s organisations run by women also emerged to champion women’s rights. The kind of reforms they advocated was female education, the franchise, and changes in the Hindu Personal Law affecting marriage, family and property rights. Following 1930 and 32, when women made a tremendous impression through their involvement in national politics, all petitions requesting legislative changes or other moves design to improve the status of women were prefaced with reference to what women had done in the nationalist movement (Everett 1978).

Renuka Ray advocated for a new personal and family law that would make women independent and fully equipped to participate in public life. The two organisations namely Women’s Indian Organization formed in 1917 and the All India Women’s Conference (led by the Indian National Congress), formed in 1927, and mainly formed to discuss issues specific to women and their social and legal disabilities. All through the 1930s, in order to press their demands, women’s organisations formed committees on legal status, undertook studies of the laws, talked to lawyers, published pamphlets on women’s position and encouraged various pieces of legislation to enhance women’s status. However, they saw all Assembly bills that were introduced in the 1930s, like the Hindu Woman’s Right to Property Bill, an amendment to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, a bill to allow inter-caste marriage, the Hindu Woman’s Right to Divorce Act, the Muslim Personal Law Bill, the Prevention of Polygamy Bill, and the Muslim women’s Right to Divorce Bill, as a piecemeal approach to improving women’s status. Women like Muthulakshmi, Renuka, Mrs. Damle and Hamid Ali were not satisfied with these piecemeal acts but wanted comprehensive legislation accompanied by social and economic change instead (Forbes1998).

The women’s organisations though were more in favour of setting a women’s agenda which dealt only with the rights and
Women levied pressure on both the British government and the Congress party to incorporate their demands as policy matter. The Indian National Congress proved a difficult ally. Only a few members agreed that women’s legal rights deserved the highest priority. The members of the Muslim League, on a resolution moved by Jinarja Hedge to set up a committee on the legal disabilities of women, openly said that they had no objection to setting up a committee as long as the committee confined its enquiry to Hindu law. The Indian women’s movement, specifically the Congress led AIWC, remained united on the issues relating to women. Begum Shahnawaz appealed to Hindu and Muslim women to work together for the benefit of all Indian women. The All India Women’s Conference, the Indian Women’s Association and the National Council for Women opposed the idea of separate electorates, which divided women along communal lines. These three organisations subsequently dispatched a telegram to the British Prime Minister condemning separate electorates. In 1931, Begum Shahnawaz reiterated the need for women’s unity.

The passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) was an outcome of the struggle of the women’s movement. Bringing a legislation to raise the age of consent of marriage of a girl and a boy was another effort these organizations made with the support of both the Congress Party and the Muslim League despite their differences when it came to political power sharing in India. The Begum of Bhopal, in her second annual meeting of the All-India Women’s Conference in Delhi in 1928, called on all the women present to avoid the religious divisions and bickering which had affected Indian political life. She particularly supported the Sarda bill, then in the legislature. Despite Muslim leaders opposing the amendment of this Act (to exclude Muslims from this Act), the women’s organisations tried to remained unite on this issue. Muslim women members of the
AIWC presented a memorial in support of the Sarda Act and told the Viceroy:

In 1929, Abru Begam urged women to support the campaign to raise the age of consent for marriage. The Women’s Indian Association emphasised the need for women to secure their civil rights through legislation. Mrs. Hamid Ali, in her presidential address to the AIWC held in Lucknow in 1932 demanded a solution for the disabilities of Hindu women, and urged the removal of customary law of the Muslims, particularly in the North-West province, which had denied Muslim women of their Islamic rights. She urged for the implementation of the Shariat law, since the Shariat gave certain rights of inheritance to Muslim women, which the customary laws did not. Commenting on a debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on women’s legal disabilities in 1940, she asked,

In 1934, the AIWC asked the government to appoint an all-India commission to consider the legal disabilities of women. Renuka Ray, legal secretary of AIWC, argued in favour of new laws for all women, regardless of which community they belonged to. The Begum and a number of other Muslim women were becoming aware of an all India sisterhood in which Muslim women could support Hindu women in their campaign to raise the age of marriage, while calling upon Hindu women to support their efforts to lessen the restriction of Purdah. However, the desire for the recognition of the Sharait as Muslim persona law was an issue which separated Muslim women from their Hindu sisters. If the Shariat were in force instead of customary law, Muslim women felt, then their rights to property, inheritance, and choice in marriage would be affirmed. Hence, in the matter of legal reform, Muslim women’s sense of separate community identity was articulated and recognition of the shariat as the operative Muslim personal law became a matter of concerned for both Muslim men and women’ (Minault1998:295).
The late 19th and first half of the 20th century were characterized by considerable debate around these issues in the Muslim community throughout India. The reform efforts by men on behalf of women were sparked by the notable progress made by other communities in India, and inspired by the changes taking place in Muslim countries of the Middle East. Nevertheless, the emergence of national sentiments among Muslim women was hampered by religious restrictions, social restraints, educational backwardness and economic limitations. The period between 1911 and 1924 was a momentous time in Indian Muslim politics encompassing as it did the Balkan wars, the revocation of the partition of Bengal - a blow to those who had seen eastern Bengal as a source of Muslim administrative jobs and political influence, the refusal of the government to approve the plan of some Muslim leaders for a university in Aligarh, the Khilafat movement, the non-cooperation and Swadeshi movements and so on. In all these political efforts women had a role to play.

Although the Muslim orthodox influence was dominant in India, two movements in the north represented a liberalizing influence through a reinterpretation of the Koran - the Aligarh and the Ahmadiyah movements. The educational influence of the Aligarh movement radically changed the Muslim outlook. The Ahmadiyah movement, on the other hand, was concerned primarily with the social teachings of Islam with regard to modern progress. Both had an effect on the gradual emancipation of Muslim women (Ghadially 1996). A more spirited advocate of women’s rights in Islam was Sayyid Mumtaz Ali. In 1898 he published his book Huquq al Niswan (women’s rights). Women also organized various Anjuma-e-Khawateen-e-islam (Muslim Women’s Organisation) in different parts of the country. Attiya Begum established a Muslim women’s conference at Aligarh in 1905. The All India Muslim Ladies Conference, claiming to represent the interests of all Muslim women, was established in Lahore in 1907. The latter’s session in Lahore in 1917 attracted 400 Muslim women participants.
from across the country. The Anjuman-e-Khwateen-Deccan was formed in 1919. The All India Muslim Ladies Association, an off-Shoot of the Mohammad an Educational Conference was founded in 1914 and controlled primarily by north Indian Sunni Muslims. In its meetings between 1914 and 1920 it passed resolutions centered around the promotion of women’s education, relaxing purdah rules and abolishing polygamy. The emergence of the women’s movement in the 1920s was also viewed as a movement against purdah and prepared society and women for greater participation in social activities. However, in 1930 the Educational Conference noted that economic pressures were working against the system of purdah (Caton, 1930). The All India Women’s Conference session of 1932 which was held in Lucknow, passed a resolution favouring girls’ (particularly Muslim girls) education. Certainly, since the turn of the century, women have found themselves confronting the conservative religious sections in their struggle for their rights. However, at the same time, women also used the Sharia in the first half of the 19th century to press their claim to property that was being denied to them under customary law, their quarrel with Islam, or rather, the official and ultra-right use of Islam came later.

On 4 March, 1934, at a combined meeting, various factions of the Muslim League, Delhi, decided to unite to one Muslim League, of which Jinnah was elected the president. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a prominent leader of the Congress, did not join the Muslim League till 1913, although he supported the League movement for separate electorate for Muslims. He even contested successfully against the League candidate for the election of the Viceroy’s Legislative Council. Within the Congress, he however, always tried to bargain for one-third reservation for his community. The formation of the All India Muslim League (AIML) was a major landmark in the history of modern India, and was the first formal entry of a centrally organized political party meant exclusively for Muslims. In 1935, the British introduced the
Government of India Act. With the introduction of this Act, the political process for community identity of the respective religious groups in India accelerated. The communalization of female political identity began after the act of 1935, and the growing rift between two communities the - the Hindus and the Muslims- created an entirely different environment. (Begum Shaista Ikramulla, 1963: 87). When the Federal Legislature started functioning after the elections under the Act of 1935, the Ulema of the Jamiat introduced the Shariat Application bill into the Federal Assembly to change Muslim personal law.

Realizing the women participation in the freedom movement, the League adopted the following resolution regarding the formation of a Women Sub-Committee at the Annual Session held at Patna from 26-29th March 1938. Whereas it is necessary to afford adequate opportunities to women for their development and growth in order to participate in the struggle for social, economic and political emancipation of the Muslim nation in India, this Session of the All India Muslim League resolves that an All India Muslim Women's Sub-Committee be formed. (Azra 2000:198-99). With this objective in view, the Sub-Committee was given the power to organize provincial and district women's Sub-Committees under the Provincial and District Muslim Leagues, enlist larger numbers of women to the membership of the Muslim League, carry on an intensive propaganda amongst Muslim women throughout India in order to instill in them a sense of greater political consciousness and finally, to advise and guide them in all such matters that rested on them for the upliftment of the Muslim society League vol.11: 318).

Lady Abdullah entered the political arena in 1919 and worked as an ardent supporter of the Khilafat Movement in her province. Existence to Lady Haroon, who through her untiring efforts was able to bring Muslim women under the banner of the Muslim League. She also made commendable contributions during the 1946 elections to
the Muslim League. Lady Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah began her political life in 1938 as a worker of the AIML, and was inducted in the Women’s Central Sub-Committee. However, as the identity became a key element in power politics and when the AIML realized that for the assertion of identity and power politics mobilizing Muslim women was necessary and, moreover, when she realized that the Muslim women member of AIWC were marginalized with regard to the wording and substance of memorials and petitions, she left the organization.

The Council of the AIML described by the Muslim press as ‘The parliament of Muslim India’ was represented by elected women from various provinces. The women councilors strengthened the organization, performing socio-humanitarian work, besides rendering the political assistance on numerous occasions. During 1937-47, several women served on the Council of AIML, prominent among whom were Miss Fatima Jinnah, Mrs. Shafi Tyebji, Begum Waseem, Begum Rehman, Begum abibullah, Rohila Khatoon, Begum Mian Ferozuddin, Begum Bashir Ahmed, Mrs. Kh. Nooruddin, Mrs. Hasina Murshed, and Mrs. K Shahabuddin. Muslim women were provided the opportunity to share national responsibilities at the Annual Sessions, Councils and the Working Committees of the Provincial Leagues (Azra 2000:33).

Despite Jinah being a supporter of women’s cause, he was not in favour of setting up of the Punjab Muslim Women’s League. This is evident from the fact that when Begum Shah Nawaz told the AIML Council at Lucknow in October 1937 that she had set up a Punjab Muslim Women’s League, Jinnah stood up and said that he did not believe in separate organizations for men and women. The Women’s Sub-Committee was a preliminary plan to encourage women to associate with the national movement. The task before the League was tremendous and necessitated establishing a broad-based organization to groom and guide Muslim women to compete for the advancement of political and public life. At an All India Muslim Women’s Conference
presided over by Lady Fazli Hussain in Lahore, there was a demand from 500 women to abolish the customary law and accord women their rights according to Muslim Personal Law.

1.3 Women’s Autonomy in India

The literature suggests several separate but interdependent components to autonomy. These include the autonomy conferred by knowledge or exposure to the outside world; decision-making authority, or the extent to which women have a say in family decisions and decisions concerning their own lives and well-being; physical autonomy in interacting with the outside world, or the extent to which women are free of constraints on their physical mobility; emotional autonomy, or the extent to which women enjoy close bonds with spouses and are free from the threat of violence and abuse; and economic and social autonomy and self-reliance, namely the extent to which women have access to and control over their own and their household’s economic resources (see, for example, Mason 1984; Caldwell 1979; Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1982; Jejeebhoy 1995).

To assess these components of female autonomy, women in this survey were asked a battery of questions concerning their status within the household. From these responses, one dimension of autonomy were selected and indexes were created for each: (1) decision-making; (2) mobility; (3) freedom.

Women in general have limited economic decision-making authority: large numbers are excluded from even the most routine decisions, and few have the major say in any decision. There is a definite pattern to the kinds of decisions in which women participate: they are far more likely to be involved in decisions that are perceived as routine in the family economy, such as those relating to food purchases, than in decisions that involve major purchases. South Indian women exhibit far more decision-making authority than Punjabi or north Indian women. In contrast, there is no evidence of differences in decision-making authority among Hindus and Muslims.
In summary, women in Tamil Nadu have significantly more decision-making authority, mobility, and access to and control over resources than women from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab and somewhat more balanced power relations with their husbands. A comparison between women in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, however, suggests greater similarities: while Punjabi women have more decision-making authority and access to and control over resources than women from Uttar Pradesh (irrespective of religion), indexes of mobility and freedom from threat are virtually identical for the two samples. Such findings offer strong support for the argument that region rather than religion has the stronger influence on women’s autonomy in South Asia.

On a policy level, moreover, it is often assumed that enhancing women’s educational attainment and economic activity status and raising their marital age can directly increase their autonomy and the extent to which they have a say in matters concerning their own lives. Our dataset allows us to assess the effect of these proxies on the various dimensions of women’s autonomy.

Our results therefore suggest that traditional factors conferring authority on women—age, marital duration, number of surviving sons, nuclear family residence, and dowry—have a more powerful effect on women’s autonomy in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, the settings with wider gender disparities, than in Tamil Nadu, where gender relations are more egalitarian. In contrast, in Tamil Nadu, education (even a primary education) plays a prominent role in enhancing almost every dimension of autonomy; wage work has a positive but less consistent effect. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, while both education and especially wage-work status enhance aspects of autonomy, their effect is less consistent.

1.4 Dimensions of Autonomy
A clear regional divide, net of individual and household characteristics, is evident in almost every index of autonomy:
decisionmaking authority, mobility, access to and control over economic resources, and, to a lesser extent, freedom from threat by husbands. Women in Tamil Nadu experience far greater autonomy than women in either Uttar Pradesh or Punjab. Also striking are the similarities in female autonomy in Uttar Pradesh in India and Punjab in Pakistan. Most convincing are findings from the pooled regression analysis, demonstrating the relative strength of the prevailing social system, as operationalized by region, in conditioning female autonomy levels in the subcontinent.

The findings also have implications for policy. In particular, the findings that education and employment do not necessarily enhance women’s autonomy and that traditional factors conferring status on women remain strong suggest that strategies to enhance women’s autonomy need to expand beyond education, employment, and delayed marriage. More comprehensive, direct, and context-specific strategies to increase women’s autonomy must simultaneously be sought. These include raising women’s gender consciousness, enabling women to mobilize and access community resources and public services, providing support for challenging traditional norms that underlie gender inequities, facilitating the acquisition of usable vocational and life skills, enhancing women’s access to and control over economic resources, and enabling women to establish and realize their rights (see, for example, United Nations 1995; Batliwala 1994; Mahmud and Johnston 1994; World Health Organization and UNICEF 1994). These strategies are particularly important for the northern cultures of the subcontinent — whether Pakistani or north Indian, whether Hindu or Muslim.

1.5 Women Empowerment: An Overview
The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. The contribution of writers and Social reformers has been well documented. The Government of India has made Empowerment of Women as one of the
Principal objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and also declared 2001 as the year of ‘Women’s Empowerment’. These issues of gender equality are discussed in World Conferences, National and International Conferences, etc. Our Constitution has conferred and guaranteed equality before law, universal adult franchise and equal opportunities for men and women as fundamental rights. The imperative of gender partnership in matters of development has been recognised. In order to give a fillip to empowerment of women and appropriate institutional mechanisms and interventions gave been consciously built into the development design. Separate institutions for women and child development. Departments at the Central and State levels, creation of the National Commission for Women and also State Commission for Women in several States are some of the important developments for the betterment and prosperity of women. The launching of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojana, Mahila Samridhi Yojona, reserving of one third of the number of seats in Panchayats and the local bodies are programmes launched with a view to improve and empower women Socially, economically and in political frontiers.

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, Multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women’s empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money – and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, Society and nation, and to gain ‘power’. According to the Country Report of Government of India, “Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power”.

Education is a potent remedy for most of the ills of the society. Education is the main instrument for transformation in any society. The economic and social returns to education for women are substantial. By education its women, a country can reduce poverty,
improve productivity, ease population pressure and offer its children a better Future. A ‘package approach’ is required for developing female education. The work participation rate indicates to a great extent the economic empowerment of women in the society. The Status of women is intimately connected with their economic position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities.

1.5.1 Grass-root Empowerment (1975-1990)

The objectives and socio-economic goals as enunciated in the preamble of the Constitution gave a direct bearing on the status of women in India. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy Provide the Mandate for and guarantee the Equality of sexes. The reticulation of special provisions for women and Children in the Constitution was prompted by the existence of strongly entrenched social injustice, disabilities and discrimination on the grounds of sex and age within the ‘inherited social system’. Gender equality was a prerequisite for achievement of the goals of democracy and a secular, socialist republic.

The Report on the committee on the Status of women in India (CSWI) – Towards Equality (1974), on the one hand made a review of prevailing unequal status of women in the country with the help of empirical evidence, and of the other, made feasible recommendations for removal of the same to achieve the goals enshrined in the Constitution. The Report dwelt at length on the overwhelming situation of poverty in the country and of the large concentration of women in the unorganized sector, and emphasized that women in poverty should receive priority in all measures to promote and sustain women’s equality. It has to be noted that this shift in emphasis was a departure both from earlier debates initiated at the global level prior to 1975. It seems that the association of women with poverty was the great discovery of the International Women’s Decade. Only its first glimmer became visible in 1975. The Report of the CSWI was a major Contributor to that glimmer.
The concept of ‘empowerment’ of women is the product of post 1975 women’s movement. However, despite its frequent use in policy documents, and by women activists and women’s studies researchers, there is considerable confusion as to its meaning and interpretation, particularly when it is used with reference to grass root women of organizations of poor women. The dictionary defines the word thus: ‘to give power to (person/group) to give them capacity to perform some physical or mental activity, to delegate authority, to give legal rights’. This definition does not seem to provide the subtle nuances, throbbing dynamism and the processual features inherent in the word ‘empowerment’ as it is used in the current women’s movement. Similarly, the definition also fails to reveal the extreme nature of prevailing inequalities between sexes, the powerlessness of women, and the oppressive burden of inherited social system on grassroot women for the removal of which the women’s movement prescribes and uses the term ‘empowerment’.

The Concept of empowerment being a product of the early eighties, it had its grounding in the changes in development thinking of the 1970s - which “saw the start of a fundamental shift away from the domination of the modernization paradigm of development thinking and intervention and a move towards a systematic search for alternatives” (Oakley et.al:’91). That ‘participation is empowering’ became and accepted notion by 1985. ‘The world conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (1979) emphasized the importance of transfer of power as implicit in participation. Since then ‘empowering’ has become an accepted term in development vocabulary... and relationship between participation and power is now widely recognized’ (Oakley et.al:opcit).

Researchers, activists, development planners/practitioners, policy-makers, international agencies and others have attempted to give a range of meaning to women’s ‘empowerment’. The terms have been variously defined as: (a) Empowerment is autonomy – both
collective and individual. It encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by economic independence. According to this definition: access to and control over, productive resources; knowledge and awareness of one’s self and society, and of personal needs, health issues, legal rights, technological innovations, and the availability of social and economic resources; and how to take advantage of them; self image i.e. the realization of one’s capabilities and the potential and confidence to take action in one’s life, are the components of empowerment. For women, empowerment is the restructuring of gender relations within both family and society at large, and it is society’s recognition of women’s equality with men in terms of their worth to society as independent persons (Hapke:1992). Empowerment means gaining autonomy and control over one’s life. The empowered become agents of their own development, are able to exercise choices, set their own agenda and are capable of challenging and changing their subordinated position in society, the several components are economic, social and political empowerment (Gitte Sorensen and Helle Poulsen).

Empowerment is a process to participate effectively, in decisions that affect women’s lives at the family, community and higher levels of the political process (ISED:1991). Empowerment is a process of building capacities and confidence of retaking decisions about one’s own life an individual and collective level and gaining control over productive resources are developed and built. The empowerment process is facilitated by crating awareness about one’s rights and responsibilities and socioeconomic, educational and political opportunities, by developing skills for utilizing productive resources and by involving oneself in collective activities and community life (Pandy:1993).
1.5.2 Definitions of Empowerment

The word empowerment is used in many different contexts and by many different organisations. For example, literature about empowerment is found in the fields of education, social work, psychology, in US radical politics in the 1960s and community development groups in the North and South, as well as in the work of feminist and development organisations. There are a variety of understandings of the term empowerment due to its widespread usage. Although the term is often used in development work, it is rarely defined. A sample of the different ways empowerment has been described or qualified, with particular reference to women’s empowerment. The idea of power is at the root of the term empowerment. Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways:

- **power over:** This power involves an either/or relationship of domination/subordination. Ultimately, it is based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation, it requires constant vigilance to maintain, and it invites active and passive resistance;

- **power to:** This power relates to having decision-making authority, power to solve problems and can be creative and enabling;

- **power with:** This power involves people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals;

- **power within:** This power refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how can individuals can recognise through analysing their experience how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this. (Williams *et al*, 1994).
Whilst understanding of power and empowerment have come from many different movements and traditions, the feminist movement has emphasised collective organisation (.power with.) and has been influential in developing ideas about ‘power within’.

**Perspectives on Empowerment**

The Human Development Report 1995, stresses that empowerment is about participation:

"Empowerment Development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. (UN, 1995 b: 12) but at the same time promotes a rather instrumentalist view of empowerment; Investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development (UN, 1995b: iii)"

For Oxfam, empowerment is about challenging oppression and inequality has defined:

"Empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights (Oxfam, 1995)."

Feminist activists stress that women’s empowerment is not about replacing one form of empowerment with another:

"Women’s empowerment should lead to the liberation of men from false value systems and ideologies of oppression. It should lead to a situation where each one can become a whole being regardless of gender, and use their fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all (Akhtar 1992 quoted in Batiwala 1994: 131)".

Jo Rowlands points out that empowerment is a bottom-up process and cannot be bestowed from the top down:
"The outside professional cannot expect to control the outcomes of authentic of empowerment being given by one group to another hides an attempt to keep control. (Rowlands, 1995: 104)"

From this multi-dimensional definition of power, it is evident that empowerment has several different and inter-related aspects. Empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision making, but also must include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space (Rowlands, 1995). Empowerment is sometimes described as being about the ability to make choices, but it must also involve being able to shape what choices are on offer. Empowerment corresponds to women challenging existing power structures which subordinate women. As such, what is seen as empowering in one context may not be in another.

Empowerment of organisations, individuals and movements has certain requisites. These include resources (finance, knowledge, technology), skills training and leadership formation on the one side; and democratic processes, dialogue, participation in policy and decision making and techniques for conflict resolution on the other...Within organisations, open and democratic processes are essential in empowering women to withstand the social and family pressures that result from their participation. Thus the long-term viability of the organisation, and the growing autonomy and control by poor women over their lives, are linked through the organisations' own internal processes of shared responsibility and decision-making. (Sen and Grown, 1985:82)

However, the meaning of empowerment can be seen to have altered as it has gained currency in mainstream development discourse. In this context, empowerment is often envisaged as individual rather than as collective, and focused on entrepreneurship and individual self-reliance, rather than on co-operation to challenge
power structures which subordinate women (or other marginalised groups). This individualistic approach to empowerment fits together with the belief in entrepreneurial capitalism and market forces as the main saviours of sickly or backward economies, and with the current trend for limiting state provision of welfare, services and employment (Young, 1993). It is also consonant with a liberal approach to democracy, emphasising individual rights and participation in decision-making, through the electoral process.

Box 1.1: Definitions of power and empowerment in practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of power</th>
<th>Implications in practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power over</td>
<td>conflict and direct confrontation between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>powerful and powerless interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power to</td>
<td>capacity building, supporting individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decision-making, leadership etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power with</td>
<td>social mobilisation, building alliances and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power within</td>
<td>increasing self esteem, awareness or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consciousness raising, confidence building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* John Gaventa (IDS Fellow).

1.6 Empowerment as a Process

Empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy. Understanding empowerment in this way means that development agencies cannot claim to ‘empower women’. Women must empower themselves. Devising coherent policies and programmes for women’s empowerment requires careful attention, because external agencies/bodies tend to be positioned with power-over target populations. The training of development professionals, in government, NGOs or donor agencies does not always equip them to consult and involve others, which supporting empowerment requires.

Appropriate external support and intervention, however, can be important to foster and support the process of empowerment. Development organisations can, under some circumstances, play an enabling or facilitating role. They can ensure that their programmes work to support women’s individual empowerment by encouraging
women’s participation, acquisition of skills, decision-making capacity, and control over resources. Agencies can support women’s collective empowerment by funding women’s organisations which work to address the causes of gender subordination, by promoting women’s participation in political systems, and by fostering dialogue between those in positions of power and organisations with women’s empowerment goals.

1.6.1 The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment

Consequently, when women’s empowerment is argued for as an end in itself, it tends to be heard as a zero-sum game, with politically weak winners and powerful losers. By contrast, instrumentalist forms of advocacy that combine the argument for gender equality/women’s empowerment with the demonstration of a broad set of desirable multiplier effects offer policy makers the possibility of achieving familiar and approved goals, albeit by unfamiliar means. One set of payoffs claimed for women’s empowerment relates to its favourable effects for children’s health, family welfare, intra household equity and fertility decline. Such arguments have received a powerful impetus from the Cairo Declaration, which links women’s reproductive choice with a range of favourable demographic outcomes. The other set of payoffs links women’s empowerment to economic growth and is based on evidence testifying to the inefficiency of patriarchal family relations in terms of market distortions, labour supply inflexibilities and perverse allocative behaviour (Collier, 1989; Jones, 1986; Sender and Smith, 1990; Palmer, 1991).

1.6.2 Conceptualizing Empowerment: Resources, Agency and Achievement

The notion of empowerment has been used in a bewildering variety of ways, from the mundane to the profound, from the particular to the very general. Empowerment is seen to occur at a number of different levels, to cover a range of different dimensions and to materialize through a variety of different processes. However, central to the idea of
Empowerment is the idea of power. This is the starting point for clarifying how the notion of empowerment will be used in this paper. One way of thinking about power is in terms of ability to make choices: to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be denied choice. The notion of empowerment is thus inescapably bound up with ‘disempowerment’ and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered in this sense, because they were never disempowered in the first place.

However, to be made relevant to the analysis of power, the notion of choice has to be qualified in a number of ways. First of all, choice necessarily implies alternatives, the ability to have chosen otherwise. There is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the material means for meeting one’s basic needs may impose painful trade-offs between important dimensions of choice. However, even when survival imperatives no longer dominate choice, there is still the problem that not all choices are equally relevant to the definition of power. Some choices have greater significance than others in terms of their consequences for people’s lives. For instance, the ability to choose to have children and the number of children to have is of greater strategic consequence, and indeed consequentially prior, in a person’s life than the ability to choose between apples and pears for lunch.

A distinction can thus be made between first order and second order choices in the analysis of power. First order choices are those strategic life choices, choice of livelihood, where to live, who to marry, whether to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, who has rights over children, freedom of movement and choice of friends that are critical for people to live the lives they want. These strategic life choices help to frame other, less consequential choices
that may be important for the quality of one’s life but do not constitute its defining parameters. The ability to exercise strategic life choices can be thought of in terms of three dimensions or different moments in the process of social change:

\[
\text{Resources} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Agency} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Achievements} \\
\text{(Pre-conditions)} \quad \text{(Process)} \quad \text{(Outcomes)}
\]

Resources include material resources in the more conventional economic sense, but for the purposes of this paper, have to be defined much more widely to encompass the various human and social resources that enhance the ability to exercise choice. Resources in this broader sense are acquired through a variety of social relationships conducted in the various institutional domains that make up a society, including the domains of family, market, state and community. The second dimension of power relates to agency, the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity their sense of agency, or what feminists have called the power within. Agency often tends to be operationalized as ‘decision making’ in the social science literature, but it can take a variety of other forms.

1.6.3 Qualifying Choice: Differences and Inequality

This is the strategy adopted by the UNDP in its gender-related development index (or GDI, a gender-disaggregated human development index or HDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM). The HDI combines country-level data on gross national product (GNP), life expectancy and educational attainment into a single index (UNDP, 1995). It is seen to represent the basic foundations from which other valued achievements can be attained. It is not a measure of well-being. Nor is it a measure of happiness. Instead, it is a measure of empowerment. It indicates that if people have these three choices, they may be able to gain access to other opportunities as well. (p. 12). By extension, the GDI represents an endorsement of the position that
empowerment for women in any context requires, as a precondition, if not perfect gender symmetry in these achievements, then certainly a closing of the gender gap in terms of wages earned, education levels attained and life expectancy. The GEM, which combines national data on gender inequalities in income earned (removing the controls introduced for differences in national income levels in the GDI measure) in professional, managerial and technical occupations and in parliamentary representation, takes us beyond the basic preconditions for choice toward achievements that could be regarded as more politically significant measures of choice.

The other point to make is that while we might agree with the UNDP that gender disparities in earnings, education, occupational status and parliamentary representation tell us something important about gender inequalities in the ability to make choices, it is only at a more disaggregated level of analysis that we can establish precisely what these disparities are telling us. For instance, the much higher representation of women in parliament, and possibly in professional employment, in Bangladesh than in Pakistan reflects the constitutional quota of public sector jobs and parliamentary seats in the former country.

1.6.4 Dimensions, Levels and Processes of Change

While most of the measures of empowerment found in the literature reviewed for this paper are defined at the level of the individual, the preceding analysis points to the structural roots of individual inequalities of power. The qualifications made to the notion of choice in the present analysis represent an attempt to acknowledge change can occur at the level of the individual, in their ‘inner’ sense of self or in their access to material resources; it can occur in relationships within the family and household; or it can reflect alteration

Empowerment is captured in this literature largely through the idea of autonomy, and the aim in much of it has been to explore associations between the ‘degrees of autonomy’ permitted to women in
different contexts and a variety of demographic outcomes. While a few studies recognize the possibility of multiple pathways through which changes in autonomy might occur, most tend to work with a fairly straightforward ‘cause-and-effect’ model of change, with changes in structural variables determining changes in individual autonomy. Proxies for women’s empowerment in these studies include the conventional status variables of women’s education and employment, as well as a host of family and kinship variables also believed to play a role in defining autonomy: marital practices, such as patterns of post-marital residence and prevalence of polygamy; female mobility in the public domain; the ability to inherit or otherwise acquire, retain and dispose of property; and norms determining the continuity or disruption of relationships between married women and their natal kin. The discipline of population studies thus takes greater account of structures than does economics, and a number of studies discussed in this paper attempt explicitly to disentangle individual and structural dimensions of women’s empowerment.

Sathar and Kazi (1997) equate both ‘access’ and ‘control’ with ‘say in decision making’. Measures of ‘access to household resources’ are based on whether women have a say in household expenses, cash to spend on household expenses and freedom to purchase clothes, jewellery and gifts for their relatives, while ‘control’ measures are based on asking who kept household earnings and who had a say in household expenditure. In Jejeebhoy’s analysis (1997), concepts of ‘access’, ‘control’ and ‘decision making’ are all used in relation to resources, but again the distinction between the terms is not clear. ‘Control’ appears to refer to ownership of resources in some cases and to decision making in relation to resources in others. Thus, ownership relates to material resources, such as land, vessels and jewellery, as well as to own savings. But material resources are also brought into the analysis through a focus on decision making, in relation to purchasing power, as well as through ‘access’, where access to
household income relates to having a say in how it is spent. In Kishor’s (1997) analysis, empowerment is defined in terms of women’s ‘control’ over key aspects of their lives defined in relation to resources (earnings and expenditures), self reliance (can women support themselves without their husband’s support), decision making (who has final say in making decisions about a variety of issues), and ‘choice’ (choosing own spouse or being consulted in the choice of marriage partner).

1.7 Measuring Agency for Empowerment
A number of different indicators of agency are to be found in the literature, but one that appears most frequently relates to decision-making agency. These indicators are usually based on women’s responses to questions about their role in specific decisions. Answers may be combined into a single index or presented separately. Some examples of the typical decisions asked about in studies covering Egypt, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh are given below.

1.7.1 Typical Decisions in Decision-making Indicators
Egypt: household budget; food cooked; visits; children’s education; children’s health; use of family planning methods (Kishor, 1997).

- India: purchase of food; purchase of major household goods; purchase of small items of jewellery; course of action if child falls ill; disciplining the child; decisions about children’s education and type of school (Jejeebhoy, 1997).

- Nigeria: household purchases; whether wife works; how to spend husband’s income; number of children to have; whether to buy and sell land; whether to use family planning; to send children to school/how much education; when sons and when daughters marry; whether to take sick children to doctor; how to rear children (Kritz et al., 1997).
Zimbabwe: wife working outside; making a major purchase; number of children (Becker, 1997).

Nepal: what food to buy; decision by women to work outside; major market transactions; number of children to have (Morgan and Niraula, 1995).

Iran: types and quantities of food; inputs; labour and sale in agricultural production (Razavi, 1992).

Pakistan: purchase of food; number of children; schooling of children; children’s marriage; major household purchases; women’s work outside the home; sale and purchase of livestock; household expenses; purchase of clothes; jewellery and gifts for wife’s relatives (Sathar and Kazi, 1997).

Bangladesh: ability to make small consumer purchases: ability to make large consumer purchases; house repair; taking in livestock for raising; leasing in of land; purchase of major asset (Hashemi et al., 1996).

Bangladesh: children’s education; visits to friends and relatives; household purchases; healthcare matters (Cleland et al., 1994).

Even a preliminary reading of these different decisions suggests that they are not all equally persuasive as indicators of women’s autonomy, because not all have the same consequential significance for women’s lives. Few cultures operate with starkly dichotomized distributions of power, with men making all the decisions and women making none. It is more common to find a hierarchy of decision-making responsibilities recognized by the family and community, where certain areas are reserved for men in their capacity as heads of households and others assigned to women in their capacity as mothers, wives, daughters and so on. Broadly speaking, the evidence from studies in South Asia suggest that, within the family, the purchase of food and other items of household consumption, as well as decisions related to children’s health, appear to fall within women’s
arena of decision making, while decisions related to education and marriage of children, and market transactions in major assets, tend to be more clearly male (Sathar and Kazi, 1997; Cleland et al., 1994; Morgan and Niraula, 1995; Hashemi et al., 1996).

This is clearly illustrated in Sathar and Kazi (1997). They found, on the basis of data from Pakistan, that the only area of decision making in which women reported both participating (71 per cent) as well as playing a major role (51 per cent) was in decisions related to the purchase of food. They participated in, but did not play a major role in deciding, the number of children to have (65 per cent and 16 per cent respectively); the schooling of children (53 per cent and 17 per cent) and the marriage of children (52 per cent and 8 per cent). They had lower levels of participation and even less likelihood of playing a major role in decisions relating to major household purchases (17 per cent and 5 per cent) and livestock transactions (21 per cent and 5 per cent). Thus major economic decisions were largely reserved for men, while women could play a more significant role in minor economic decisions. They participated, but did not have a major role, in decisions relating to numbers of children and their schooling. They had an even less decisive role when it came to children’s marriage.

Sathar and Kazi’s study serves to highlight the fact that decision-making hierarchies occur not only between different categories of decisions, but between degrees of involvement in the same decision. For example, they found that while 65 per cent of women reported that they had participated in decision making about how many children to have, only 16 per cent of those who did not want any more children were using contraceptives. This signals the importance of distinguishing between participating in and having a major say in decisions. Still other studies (Beneria and Roldan, 1987) point to various critical control points within decision-making processes where such control is defined in terms of the consequential
Women and Empowerment: An Introduction

Pahl (1989) distinguishes between the control or policy-making function, decisions about resource allocation, and the management function, decisions pertaining to implementation. This distinction might explain the finding by the Egyptian Male Survey in 1992 (cited in Ali, 1996) that men were dominant in the decision to adopt contraceptives, the policy decision, but tended to leave the choice of contraception largely to women (although Ali’s qualitative study found men’s continuing involvement in women’s choice of contraceptives as well).

In methodological terms, these distinctions suggest the need for greater care in selecting and quantifying the decisions that are to serve as indicators of empowerment, with attention given to the consequential significance of areas of decision making or of different stages in the decision-making process. Evidence that women played a role in making decisions that were of little consequence or were assigned to women in any case by virtue of their pre-existing roles and responsibilities tells us far less about their power to choose than does evidence on decisions relating to their critical life choices or to choices they had been denied in the past.

This can be illustrated by comparing Silberschimdt’s (1992) ethnographic account of formal and informal decision making among the Kisii in Kenya. The formal account of decision making given by women ascribed most of the power to men: The husbands were said to be heads of households and their ‘owners’ as an afterthought the wives might add, they can buy us just like cattle. At the same time, however, accounts of actual decision making gave a very different picture:

1.7.2 Measuring Empowerment in Practice Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators

Empowerment—that is, enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes—is an increasingly familiar term within the World Bank and
many other development agencies. Targeting practitioners engaged in the analysis of projects and policies that have empowerment components, this paper provides guidance on how to unpack the concept in order to measure related processes and outcomes. First recognized by the Bank in its *World Development Report 2000/2001* (World Bank 2000b) as one of the three pillars of poverty reduction, empowerment is now found in the documentation of over 1,800 World Bank-aided projects, and it is the subject of debate and analytic work within the development community.

1.7.3 A Framework for Understanding and Measuring Empowerment

If a person or group is empowered, they possess the capacity to make effective choices; that is, to translate their choices into desired actions and outcomes. Agency is defined as an actor’s ability to make meaningful choices; that is, the actor is able to envisage options and make a choice. Opportunity structure is defined as the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate. Working together, these factors give rise to different degrees of empowerment.

1.8 Household Decision Making is Empowerment: A Methodological Review

Women’s empowerment is the process by which women gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives (Sen and Batliwala 2000). Till recently, variables such as education and employment were commonly used to capture empowerment and other similar concepts such as women’s autonomy and status. However, these variables are only proxies for empowerment (Jejeebhoy 2000); the search for more direct measures has focused on capturing ‘evidence’ of empowerment (Kishor 2000). One widely accepted measure of ‘evidence’ (or lack thereof) is women’s participation in household decision making. This variable is increasingly used as an objective indicator of women’s household level empowerment, particularly in demographic and health studies (Schuler and Hashemi, 1994; Balk 1997; Hindin 2000; Kritz et al. 2000). The wide acceptance of women’s participation in household
decision making as an indicator of empowerment is largely due to the intuitive equating of decision making with power and control and “there is a nexus of a few key, overlapping terms that are most often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control and power” (Malhotra et al 2002). Furthermore, decision making appears to have cross-cultural validity as an indicator of empowerment, at least at the conceptual level: a woman who participates in decisions that affect or control her life and environment are everywhere more empowered than women who do not. While the concept of decision making as empowerment is appealing in its universal applicability, translating the concept into indicators that mean the same thing across countries still remains to be fully explored. In particular, how exactly is the act of making decisions to be captured? Is it enough that women ‘participate’ in decision making or must it be that they alone have the final say in the decision? Further, how is participation in different decisions to be effectively summarized? Are all decisions equally important in their relationship to empowerment? If not, how do we weight different decisions as we combine the information?

The inclusion of questions about decision making in the DHS derived directly from the argument that women’s participation in decisions that affect their daily lives is one of the few cross-culturally applicable aspects of household gender relations and women’s empowerment with relevance to demographic and health outcomes. The specific questions included were:

The choice of specific types of decisions was guided by the need to make included decision areas relevant to all women irrespective of their marital status

These data have most commonly been analyzed by looking at women’s participation in one or more decisions (where participation is defined as taking decisions alone or jointly with husbands or someone else) or by creating an index which is a simple count of the number of decisions (sometimes weighted with arbitrary weights) in which a
woman participates (see various DHS country reports since about 2000, Hindin 2003, Kritz et al. 2000). Empowerment to be represented by cumulating the number of decisions that women participate in (implying that the more the types of decisions participated in, the higher is empowerment).

Provides information on key factors relevant to an analysis of women’s empowerment for all five countries. Age and number of children capture women’s lifecycle stage. Empowerment of women can be expected to vary over the life cycle since the rights and responsibilities of women vary with age and the parity (Rugh 1984; Jejeebhoy 2000). All else being the same, older women and women with children are likely to have greater status, rights and responsibilities than younger women or women with no children. A woman’s level of education, her employment status, particularly employment for cash, and media exposure are expected to be positively related to empowerment (Mason 1986; Kishor 2000). Women who are educated, employed, and exposed to the media are likely to be better equipped with the information and the means needed to function effectively in the modern world. Together these factors are expected to influence women’s inherent abilities as well as their attitudes towards gender roles. In addition, employment helps to provide alternative sources of social identity, financial independence, and exposure to and integration into power structures independent of kin networks (Dixon-Mueller 1993). Regular media exposure is measured here in terms of exposure at least once a week to one or more of the following types of media: newspapers/magazines, radio or television. Some have argued that women’s empowerment is more an attribute of their specific cultural environments than of the women themselves (Mason, Smith, and Morgan 1998; Smith 1989). This is in part because the cultural context can define not just gender roles, but also the norms of acceptable behavior, rights, and duties associated with these roles. In addition, the characteristics of the place of
residence as well as the socioeconomic status of the household define the actual opportunities available to women. Hence, other factors examined here include women’s urban-rural residence, nuclear family status and household wealth. Women are said to be residing in a nuclear family if they live alone or live with a husband/partner, with or without children (including grandchildren) but no other adult. Current co-residence of the husband/partner in the household is used as a control variable since women are much less likely to take a decision jointly with their husband/partner if he is away for a long time.

The survey were conducted to collect data on socio-economic indicators for women in the reproductive age group 15-49 years as well as an their own characteristics and those of the households they live in. The choice of specific types of decisions was guided by the need to make included decision areas relevant to all women irrespective of their marital status.

1.9 Women’s Empowerment and Social Context: Results from Five Asian Countries

Social scientists and development practitioners have long been interested in the conditions that empower women. As the evidence that gender equality is important for economic growth, poverty reduction and enhanced human well-being has grown, interest in the determinants and correlates of women’s empowerment has also grown.1 Unfortunately, confusion over the definition and measurement of this concept remains widespread. Indeed, the tradition that measures women’s empowerment by their years of schooling, employment experience or age at marriage remains alive, even if increasingly called into question on both conceptual and empirical grounds (e.g., Balk 1994; Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996; Malhotra, Schuler and Boender 2002).

The first point is that power within the household—the particular aspect of women’s empowerment on which we focus—is
strongly influenced by social context (national and community) because it is strongly determined by social institutions rather than by individual characteristics. The second point is that all aspects of women’s empowerment are multidimensional and the interrelations among different dimensions depend on social context. The concept of women’s empowerment implicitly assumes that in all societies, men control women—or, to be more precise, men control at least some of the women of their social class, particularly those in their households and families. In this view, women are a “class” in the (two-class) gender stratification system, a system that is governed by shared norms and values, i.e., it has a cultural as well as relational and material component (Smith 1989). This view of women’s empowerment is part of a sociological or anthropological conception which recognizes that individuals belong to and are strongly influenced by social collectivities that are integrated by common ideological or normative systems. These ideological systems make prescriptions about many fundamental principles of social life, for example, how to organize families, how to allocate wealth among different groups or individuals, and how to organize relations between males and females. In this view, the perceptions, tastes, and choices of individual decisionmakers are strongly influenced by the nature of the ideological or normative systems to which their social collectivity subscribes and into which they have been socialized.

1.10 The Impact of Social Context on Empowerment
We begin by examining variation in women’s empowerment according to country and community. Variation by country and state on the first three measures—the economic decision-making scale, they say in family size decisions scale, and the freedom of movement scale—closely matches our expectations. Are the community differences seen, indeed the product of differences across communities in gender or family systems? One hint that the community differences in empowerment are likely to reflect ideologies of gender, at least in part,
is that many of these differences involve communities of identification rather than communities that are strictly geographically based. For example, in India, Muslim women tend to have less empowerment than their Hindu neighbors, even though both groups of women often live in the same geographic clusters of villages. For some aspects of empowerment, the Muslim-Hindu differences are particularly pronounced in Tamil Nadu, where Hindu women do not, as a rule, practice *purdah* but Muslim women do (Mason, Morgan, and Smith 1997). Similarly, in Malaysia, Chinese women have strikingly greater empowerment than most of their Malay or Indian counterparts, especially when it comes to their freedom of movement. In the Philippines, women in the two Muslim communities have far lower freedom of movement than women living in the other Philippines communities. Thus, religion and ethnicity are often important for women’s empowerment (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001; Mason et al. 2002). This is consistent with the idea that gender norms play an important role in determining women’s empowerment.

That a woman’s community can better explain her score on a particular empowerment measure than can her own age, education, age at first union or economic experience, suggests how powerful an influence on a woman’s empowerment her community is. It is important to recognize that the characteristics of women living in a given community are themselves at least partly the product of the community’s gender system. For example, communities that keep women secluded also tend to deny them full educational and employment opportunities. For this reason, the coefficients of determination associated with the models based on individual characteristics may *overstate* the ultimate causal significance of women’s personal and household characteristics for their empowerment. We therefore conclude that community is more important than individual characteristics for most of the forms of empowerment considered here. The exception is experiencing
domestic violence, which is strongly influenced by the household’s socioeconomic status as well as by social setting.

Thus, when we look within countries rather than across them, we find that the aggregate measures of women’s gender-role attitudes usually can explain a substantial proportion of total inter-community variation in women’s domestic empowerment. This suggests that one important reason for community variation in women’s empowerment within countries is indeed the nature of gender systems and their norms. Inter-country variation is not so readily explained in this way. We suspect this may reflect a relatively weak connection between women’s gender-role attitudes and aspects of national context that are important for women’s empowerment such as laws, judicial precedents and policies regarding the education, employment, and legal rights of women. We therefore view the total sample models as a less telling test than the within-country models for the idea that community variation in women’s empowerment reflects gender system norms. In sum, then, the analysis presented here suggests the importance of gender systems for women’s empowerment. The aspects of women’s empowerment examined here vary sharply by country and community, more so than they do by women’s personal characteristics such as employment or education. Moreover, models that measure communities’ gender-role norms by aggregating the normative attitudes of women within each community can explain at least two-thirds of the total inter-community variation in women’s empowerment that exists in most of the countries covered by this study. Female empowerment is thus more appropriately considered a reflection of social systems than an atomized, individual trait.

I have shown that community can explain more variation in the empowerment of individual women than can their personal and household characteristics. Moreover, within countries at least, gender norms can explain two-thirds or more of all the variation in women’s empowerment that occurs across communities. Thus, gender norms
appear to be an important feature of communities that determines the levels of empowerment enjoyed by the female members of these communities. Female empowerment in the domestic sphere is multidimensional, both conceptually and empirically. For example, the extent of a woman’s say in the household’s economic decisions does not necessarily match her freedom of movement in the community or the extent to which she is subjected to coercive interpersonal controls by her husband. Moreover, how strongly one dimension of empowerment is related to other dimensions is itself variable across social contexts. In some settings, different dimensions of empowerment tend to rise and fall together more much closely than in other settings. Not just from shifts in individual decision-making. That some of the policies traditionally used to empower women—higher ages at marriage for girls, greater levels of schooling and better employment opportunities for women—may indeed contribute to women’s empowerment across a wide range of settings. Obviously, the analysis in this paper ultimately pertains to 56 communities in five Asian countries, not to all settings in the world.

1.11 Definition of Women Status
Status, in the sense used here, has been defined in terms of social standing within a community derived from meeting the expectations set up by a hierarchy outside oneself: status implies hierarchy (see the discussion in Abadian, 1996). Status considerations are relevant to hierarchies of class and caste as well as gender, so that norms defining gender propriety are frequently bound up with the maintenance of hierarchies of caste and class. Autonomy, on the other hand, refers to qualities of self-determination and independence; it refers to the capacity to define one’s own goals and act on them without reference to notions of propriety and social standing. Autonomy is thus rooted in the notion of the individual, while status is derived at a social level.
However, individuals rarely operate as if they do not exist in society. All forms of autonomy are also socially embedded. The value of the idea of status is that it draws attention to the influence of the social in ascribing greater value to certain kinds of choices over others, and hence gives greater value to those who make these choices. In other words, it reminds us of the interconnectedness of social life in that we care what others think. However, in certain contexts, the nature of prevailing status considerations and cultural values will lead women to choose dependence over autonomy, not only by curtailing their ability to act autonomously, but by bestowing prestige, honour and value to those who conform to these norms. When such contexts set up a trade-off for women between their ability to make independent choices in critical arenas of their lives such as marriage, reproduction, friendship and so on and their ability to enjoy status and respect within the family and community, status becomes antithetical to autonomy.

A similar point about the need to recognize the social-embeddedness of change came out of Villarreal's study of a development intervention in western Mexico and led to her and others (Arce et al., 1994) to question Schriver's definition of autonomy as control over their lives, their bodies and their projects, and also to ask what such a notion of control meant in the context of rural Mexico.

1.13 National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a
marked shift in the approach to women’s issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

The Policy also takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Five Year Plan and the other Sectoral Policies relating to empowerment of Women. The women’s movement and a wide-spread network of non-Government Organisations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women’s concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-
2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the Platform for Action, Five Years After- An assessment". Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country.

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices. Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

1.13.1 Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include-

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- 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
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- 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.

- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women’s organizations.

1.13.2 Policy Prescriptions
(i) Judicial Legal Systems
Legal-judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women’s needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. New laws will be enacted and existing laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offence. At the initiative of and with the full participation of all stakeholders including community and religious leaders, the Policy would aim to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women. The evolution of property rights in a patriarchal system has contributed to the subordinate status of women. The Policy would aim to encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance by evolving consensus in order to make them gender just.
(ii) Decision Making

Women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also the advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards, Trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies, will be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women–friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

(iii) Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in the Development Process

Policies, programmes and systems will be established to ensure mainstreaming of women’s perspectives in all developmental processes, as catalysts, participants and recipients. Wherever there are gaps in policies and programmes, women specific interventions would be undertaken to bridge these. Coordinating and monitoring mechanisms will also be devised to assess from time to time the progress of such mainstreaming mechanisms. Women’s issues and concerns as a result will specially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, sectoral policies, plans and programmes of action.

(v) Economic Empowerment of Women

Poverty Eradication: Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macroeconomic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. There will be improved implementation of programmes which are already women oriented with special targets for women. Steps will be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services,
by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

**Micro Credit:** In order to enhance women’s access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.

**Women and Economy:** Women’s perspectives will be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers will be recognized in the formal and informal sectors (including home based workers) and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions will be drawn up. Such measures could include:

a) Reinterpretation and redefinition of conventional concepts of work wherever necessary e.g. in the Census records, to reflect women’s contribution as producers and workers.

b) Preparation of satellite and national accounts.

c) Development of appropriate methodologies for undertaking (a) and (b) above.

**(vi) Globalization**

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women’s equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of Women & Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the
growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.

(vii) Women and Agriculture
In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts will be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.

(viii) Women and Industry
The important role played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing and agro industry and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They would be given comprehensive support in terms of labour legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors. Women at present cannot work in night shift in factories even if they wish to. Suitable measures will be taken to enable women to work on the night shift in factories. This will be accompanied with support services for security, transportation etc.

(ix) Support Services
The provision of support services for women, like child care facilities, including crèches at work places and educational institutions, homes for the aged and the disabled will be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure their full cooperation in social, political and economic life. Women-friendly personnel policies will also
be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

**Social Empowerment of Women**

**Education:** Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes/Minorities. Gender sensitive curricula would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

**Health:** A holistic approach to women’s health which includes both nutrition and health services will be adopted and special attention will be given to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a priority concern. This policy reiterates the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) set out in the National Population Policy 2000. Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. Measures will be adopted that take into account the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise informed choices, their vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, TB, and water borne diseases as well as hypertension and cardio-pulmonary diseases. The social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and
other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective.

To effectively meet problems of infant and maternal mortality, and early marriage the availability of good and accurate data at micro level on deaths, birth and marriages is required. Strict implementation of registration of births and deaths would be ensured and registration of marriages would be made compulsory. In accordance with the commitment of the National Population Policy (2000) to population stabilization, this Policy recognizes the critical need of men and women to have access to safe, effective and affordable methods of family planning of their choice and the need to suitably address the issues of early marriages and spacing of children. Interventions such as spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage and special programmes like BSY should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriages are eliminated. Women's traditional knowledge about health care and nutrition will be recognized through proper documentation and its use will be encouraged. The use of Indian and alternative systems of medicine will be enhanced within the framework of overall health infrastructure available for women.

**Nutrition:** In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focussed attention would be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. This is also important in view of the critical link between the health of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children. Special efforts will be made to tackle the problem of macro and micro nutrient deficiencies especially amongst pregnant and lactating women as it leads to various diseases and disabilities. Intra-household discrimination in nutritional matters vis-à-vis girls and women will be sought to be ended through appropriate strategies. Widespread use of nutrition education would
be made to address the issues of intra-household imbalances in nutrition and the special needs of pregnant and lactating women. Women’s participation will also be ensured in the planning, superintendence and delivery of the system.

**Drinking Water and Sanitation:** Special attention will be given to the needs of women in the provision of safe drinking water, sewage disposal, toilet facilities and sanitation within accessible reach of households, especially in rural areas and urban slums. Women’s participation will be ensured in the planning, delivery and maintenance of such services.

**Housing and Shelter:** Women’s perspectives will be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both in rural and urban areas. Special attention will be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single women, heads of households, working women, students, apprentices and trainees.

**(xi) Environment**

Women will be involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programmes for environment, conservation and restoration. Considering the impact of environmental factors on their livelihoods, women’s participation will be ensured in the conservation of the environment and control of environmental degradation. The vast majority of rural women still depend on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. In order to ensure the efficient use of these energy resources in an environmental friendly manner, the Policy will aim at promoting the programmes of non-conventional energy resources. Women will be involved in spreading the use of solar energy, biogas, smokeless chulahs and other rural application so as to have a visible impact of these measures in influencing eco system and in changing the life styles of rural women.
(xii) **Science and Technology**
Programmes will be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness will also be stepped up. Special measures would be taken for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women’s needs as well as to reduce their drudgery will be given a special focus too.

(xiii) **Women in Difficult Circumstances**
In recognition of the diversity of women’s situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of specially disadvantaged groups, measures and programmes will be undertaken to provide them with special assistance. These groups include women in extreme poverty, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

(xiv) **Violence against Women**
All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. A special
emphasis will also be laid on programmes and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

(xv) Rights of the Girl Child
All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violation of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking strong measures both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. These would relate specifically to strict enforcement of laws against prenatal sex selection and the practices of female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution etc. Removal of discrimination in the treatment of the girl child within the family and outside and projection of a positive image of the girl child will be actively fostered. There will be special emphasis on the needs of the girl child and earmarking of substantial investments in the areas relating to food and nutrition, health and education, and in vocational education. In implementing programmes for eliminating child labour, there will be a special focus on girl children.

(xvi) Mass Media
Media will be used to portray images consistent with human dignity of girls and women. The Policy will specifically strive to remove demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against women. Private sector partners and media networks will be involved at all levels to ensure equal access for women particularly in the area of information and communication technologies. The media would be encouraged to develop codes of conduct, professional guidelines and other self regulatory mechanisms to remove gender stereotypes and promote balanced portrayals of women and men.

1.14 Operational Strategies
1.14.1 Action Plans
All Central and State Ministries will draw up time bound Action Plans for translating the Policy into a set of concrete actions, through a participatory process of consultation with Centre/State Departments
of Women and Child Development and National /State Commissions for Women. The Plans will specifically including the following:

i) Measurable goals to be achieved by 2010.

ii) Identification and commitment of resources.

iii) Responsibilities for implementation of action points.

iv) Structures and mechanisms to ensure efficient monitoring, review and gender impact assessment of action points and policies.

v) Introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process.

In order to support better planning and programme formulation and adequate allocation of resources, Gender Development Indices (GDI) will be developed by networking with specialized agencies. These could be analyzed and studied in depth. Gender auditing and development of evaluation mechanisms will also be undertaken along side. Collection of gender disaggregated data by all primary data collecting agencies of the Central and State Governments as well as Research and Academic Institutions in the Public and Private Sectors will be undertaken. Data and information gaps in vital areas reflecting the status of women will be sought to be filled in by these immediately. All Ministries/Corporations/Banks and financial institutions etc. will be advised to collect, collate, disseminate and maintain/publish data related to programmes and benefits on a gender disaggregated basis. This will help in meaningful planning and evaluation of policies.

1.14.2 Institutional Mechanisms

Institutional mechanisms, to promote the advancement of women, which exist at the Central and State levels, will be strengthened. These will be through interventions as may be appropriate and will relate to, among others, provision of adequate resources, training and advocacy skills to effectively influence macro-policies, legislation, programmes etc. to achieve the empowerment of women. The National and State Councils will be formed to oversee the operationalisation of
the Policy on a regular basis. The National Council will be headed by the Prime Minister and the State Councils by the Chief Ministers and be broad in composition having representatives from the concerned Departments/Ministries, National and State Commissions for Women, Social Welfare Boards, representatives of Non-Government Organizations, Women’s Organisations, Corporate Sector, Trade Unions, financing institutions, academics, experts and social activists etc. These bodies will review the progress made in implementing the Policy twice a year. The National Development Council will also be informed of the progress of the programme undertaken under the policy from time to time for advice and comments.

National and State Resource Centres on women will be established with mandates for collection and dissemination of information, undertaking research work, conducting surveys, implementing training and awareness generation programmes, etc. These Centers will link up with Women’s Studies Centres and other research and academic institutions through suitable information networking systems. While institutions at the district level will be strengthened, at the grass-roots, women will be helped by Government through its programmes to organize and strengthen into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) at the Anganwadi/Village/Town level. The women’s groups will be helped to institutionalize themselves into registered societies and to federate at the Panchyat/Municipal level. These societies will bring about synergistic implementation of all the social and economic development programmes by drawing resources made available through Government and Non-Government channels, including banks and financial institutions and by establishing a close Interface with the Panchayats/Municipalities.

1.14.3 Resource Management
Availability of adequate financial, human and market resources to implement the Policy will be managed by concerned Departments,
financial credit institutions and banks, private sector, civil society and other connected institutions. This process will include:

a) Assessment of benefits flowing to women and resource allocation to the programmes relating to them through an exercise of gender budgeting. Appropriate changes in policies will be made to optimize benefits to women under these schemes;

b) Adequate resource allocation to develop and promote the policy outlined earlier based on (a) above by concerned Departments.

c) Developing synergy between personnel of Health, Rural Development, Education and Women & Child Development Department at field level and other village level functionaries’

d) Meeting credit needs by banks and financial credit institutions through suitable policy initiatives and development of new institutions in coordination with the Department of Women & Child Development.

The strategy of Women’s Component Plan adopted in the Ninth Plan of ensuring that not less than 30% of benefits/funds flow to women from all Ministries and Departments will be implemented effectively so that the needs and interests of women and girls are addressed by all concerned sectors. The Department of Women and Child Development being the nodal Ministry will monitor and review the progress of the implementation of the Component Plan from time to time, in terms of both quality and quantity in collaboration with the Planning Commission. Efforts will be made to channelize private sector investments too, to support programmes and projects for advancement of women

1.14.4 Legislation
The existing legislative structure will be reviewed and additional legislative measures taken by identified departments to implement the Policy. This will also involve a review of all existing laws including
personal, customary and tribal laws, subordinate legislation, related rules as well as executive and administrative regulations to eliminate all gender discriminatory references. The process will be planned over a time period 2000-2003. The specific measures required would be evolved through a consultation process involving civil society, National Commission for Women and Department of Women and Child Development. In appropriate cases the consultation process would be widened to include other stakeholders too. Effective implementation of legislation would be promoted by involving civil society and community. Appropriate changes in legislation will be undertaken, if necessary. In addition, following other specific measures will be taken to implement the legislation effectively.

(a) Strict enforcement of all relevant legal provisions and speedy redressal of grievances will be ensured, with a special focus on violence and gender related atrocities.

(b) Measures to prevent and punish sexual harassment at the place of work, protection for women workers in the organized/unorganized sector and strict enforcement of relevant laws such as Equal Remuneration Act and Minimum Wages Act will be undertaken,

(c) Crimes against women, their incidence, prevention, investigation, detection and prosecution will be regularly reviewed at all Crime Review fora and Conferences at the Central, State and District levels. Recognised, local, voluntary organizations will be authorized to lodge Complaints and facilitate registration, investigations and legal proceedings related to violence and atrocities against girls and women.

(d) Women’s Cells in Police Stations, Encourage Women Police Stations Family Courts, Mahila Courts, Counselling Centers, Legal Aid Centers and Nyaya Panchayats will be strengthened
and expanded to eliminate violence and atrocities against women.

(e) Widespread dissemination of information on all aspects of legal rights, human rights and other entitlements of women, through specially designed legal literacy programmes and rights information programmes will be done.

1.14.5 Gender Sensitization
Training of personnel of executive, legislative and judicial wings of the State, with a special focus on policy and programme framers, implementation and development agencies, law enforcement machinery and the judiciary, as well as non-governmental organizations will be undertaken. Other measures will include:

(a) Promoting societal awareness to gender issues and women’s human rights.

(b) Review of curriculum and educational materials to include gender education and human rights issues

(c) Removal of all references derogatory to the dignity of women from all public documents and legal instruments.

(d) Use of different forms of mass media to communicate social messages relating to women’s equality and empowerment.

1.14.6 Panchayati Raj Institutions
The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution have served as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structure for women. The PRIs will play a central role in the process of enhancing women’s participation in public life. The PRIs and the local self Governments will be actively involved in the implementation and execution of the National Policy for Women at the grassroots level.
1.14.7 Partnership with the voluntary sector organizations
The involvement of voluntary organizations, associations, federations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, women’s organizations, as well as institutions dealing with education, training and research will be ensured in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and review of all policies and programmes affecting women. Towards this end, they will be provided with appropriate support related to resources and capacity building and facilitated to participate actively in the process of the empowerment of women.

1.14.8 International Cooperation
The Policy will aim at implementation of international obligations/commitments in all sectors on empowerment of women such as the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+5) and other such instruments. International, regional and sub-regional cooperation towards the empowerment of women will continue to be encouraged through sharing of experiences, exchange of ideas and technology, networking with institutions and organizations and through bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships.