

# Periodic Research

## Democracy, Women Rights and Empowerment

### Abstract

*'You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women'.*  
Pdt. Jawaharlal Nehru.

Women rights and issues have always been a subject of serious concern of academicians, intelligentsia and policy makers. From pastoral society to contemporary information and global society, the role of women is changing. The continuity of changes in socio- economic and psycho- cultural aspects and globalization showing its deep impact all over the world, the role and responsibilities of women has attained new definition and perspective. Addition to this the responsibilities has widened the role of women who also share the financial responsibilities. But, as the role and responsibilities of women is increasing gradually, it is also important to notice that their rights are also violated, or due respect to their rights are not given by the society. Women's status is determined by the indicators like women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, women's acceptance of unequal gender roles, exposure to media, access to education, women's experience of domestic violence etc.

**Keyword:** Intelligentsia, Responsibilities, Financial, Autonomy

### Introduction

Women account for more than one half of humanity and they work for nearly two-thirds of the work hours; but they receive only some one-tenth of the world income, and own less than a bare 1 per cent of the world's productive assets.

According to UN Report 2005, women make up 70 per cent of the world's one billion absolute poor. They also makes up two third of the world's illiterate. One half of women in Asia and Africa are malnourished. One third of the women in developing world are subject daily to domestic violence.

India has a highly skewed sex ratio, which is attributed to sex-selective abortion and female infanticide affecting approximately one million female babies per year. In, 2011, government stated India was missing three million girls and there are now 48 less girls per 1,000 boys.

On the other hand, it is seen that number of the women in Indian population is fast decreasing. Census 2001 revealed that the sex ratio of the population of one to six years had decling during the last one decade from 945 to 927 per thousand, which in turn , has highlighted the wide spreading practice of female foeticide despite legislation banning it. The determination of the sex of the foetus by ultrasound scanning, amniocentesis and in vitro fertilization has aggravated their situation.

The child sex ratio (CSR) has been falling in India for the last fifty years. This decline from 945 to 927, however, has been sharpest in the decade 1991-2001 (the period of globalization). The sex ratio and CSR from 1961-2001 are shown in below table:

Sex Ratio (1961-2001)		
Year	Sex ratio	CSR(0-6 Years)
1961	941	976
1971	930	964
1981	934	62
2001	933	27

Source: Registrar General of India.



**Deepak Kumar Gogoi**  
Assistant Professor  
Deptt. of Political Science  
Nalbari College  
Nalbari, Assam.

The above statistical figure reveals that the sex ratio is gradually declining, which signifies itself the growing tendency towards unwanted girl child. Children especially boys are viewed as extra hands that can provide income and help with family chores. On the other hand in case of birth control it is seen that the poorer the family, the more children they seek. Hence, it is evident that the economic status of the family plays a major role in family planning. Birth control and reproductive health of women are behavioral issues affected mostly by economic, access to health care and education. Until this reality is accepted the desired change may not be attainable in the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, so far as family planning is concern, the average woman living in a rural area in India has little or no control over becoming pregnant. Women, particularly women in rural areas, do not have access to safe and self-controlled methods of contraception. The public health system emphasizes permanent methods like sterilization, or long-term methods like IUDs that do not need follow-up. Sterilization accounts for more than 75% of total contraception, with female sterilization accounting for almost 95% of all sterilizations. (3)

### **Problem and Objectivity of the Study**

In this paper an attempt has been made to find out different aspects of women rights and its violation in Indian context and also try to relate it with the term 'Empowerment' which is justified as remedial measures in protecting Women Rights. Here question arises despite providing plethora of rights and constitutional and legal frame works to the women, are women really empowered in a true sense? Women rights violation is still continuing. What is lacking behind and what else to be done on the part of it, has to be find out, is the main objectivity of this paper.

### **Sources of Data**

The sources of data are from secondary sources. Mainly from Books, Magazines such as India Today, Economic and Political Weekly, Kurushetra, Third Concept and News Papers like The Hindustan Times, The Hindu etc.

### **Hypothesis drawn**

- (1) Women in India are still underprivileged, less empowered and violation against them is still continuing.
- (2) The majority of women do not have the final say on the use of their earning or all other household decision asked about it.
- (3) Institutional mechanisms related with women are also be empowered more in dealing with women issues.
- (4) Women can be empowered only if they are given education and made aware of their rights and hence they themselves prioritise their lives. Violence has to be completely eradicated from her life, then and only then can the dream of empowerment becomes a reality.

### **Methodology adopted**

As, the predominant stream of research in women's studies is concerned with documenting discrimination, both empirical and conceptual, analysis reason for this and offering solutions in order eventually to eliminate or at least mitigate existing bias and more towards a more egalitarian social milieu and better analysis. So, an effort is also done, in this direction to highlight the women issue. The study is an analytical in nature and most data are relying on secondary sources.

### **Review of the Literature**

As there are lot of books available on women right and empowerment issue, yet the researcher has gone through few of them, which are suppose to be quite relevant with the topic.

- (1) **Emancipation and Empowerment of Women**  
Dr. (Mrs.) V. Mohini Giri. (1988) In this work, the author with her intimate knowledge and incisive analysis, with personal experience has presented an authentic account of the process of women's empowerment. In this book the author draw multiple concerns of socio-economic facts, such as empowerment of women , gender equality, gender justice, marginised groups among women, child prostitution and trafficking, violence against women, role of the media, gender issues and habitat, democracy and governance and other related subjects are succinctly discussed in the author's inimitable style. The book is very useful as it covers all the important aspects, which is useful and relevant to the research paper. Right from the role of National Commission for Women, its functions, women rights issues, violence of women right, gender equality and social justice etc.
- (2) **Indian Women (Myth and Reality)** by Jasodhara Bagch (Edited book) 1995. This book analyses the current myths of Indian womanhood and explains how these influence the lives of Indian women. The essays in this volume written by noted historian, social scientists, activists and litterateurs study the social status of women over the post hundred years as perceived through prevailing social norms, religion, art, literature and film. They addresses the problem of all women, who strive to enrich their lives and surroundings and focus on the fact that whether urban middle class or rural poor, society always seeks to marginalize the through laws, media representation, social customs and economic deprivation. The book notes with concern that no genuine social upliftment can be effected under the material and ideological constrains on their lives are properly confronted.

One of the important aspects in this book, an article written by Nirmala Banerjee, titled 'Sexual division of labour' is itself a myth that helps devalue women's work on merely reproductive and not productive. The high perpetuates, the belief that women are naturally, hence invariably, the child bearers and child rearers. Whatever work can be accommodated into the pattern of

# Periodic Research

child bearing and child rearing is conceded to women as paid work, whereas the observed reality is that it is child bearing and child rearing that has to fit into women work. In any case, women's work is a class- interpellated concept. The construct of 'division of labour' which was linked by Adam Smith to greater efficiency and a bigger market conceals the relation of subordination that is endemic in 'Sexual division of labour'.

**(3) Writing the Women's movement: A Reader. - by Mala Khullar (Edited Book) 2005.**

This book is edited by Mala Khullar, which is a collection of articles dealing with different women issues, such as 'Changing Term of Political Discourse, Women movement in India' 1970-1990's by Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar; 'Law and Gender Inequality, The politics of women's Rights in India' by Flavia Agnes; 'Transformative Politics, Dimensions of Women's participation in Panchayati Raj' by Kumud Sharma; 'Education status of Girls and women, The Emerging scenario' by Ratna Sudarshan; 'Encountering violence' by Malavika Karlekar etc articles were very important.

**(4) Women and Development.- Editors- Krishna Ahooja- Patel, S.Uma Devi, G.A. Tadas.(1999)**

This is an edited book, contributed by many eminent scholars on the issue of women and development. The important article titled 'Current trends and data on women and Children' by WV Qing from Women's studies Forum, Beijing Foreign Studies University China has given emphasis on issues and needs of the rural women in china, where he explain that people in most of the rural areas want basic infrastructure, drinking water, made available to people's home and water for irrigation, both roads, transportation, electricity for all villages, fertilizers and plastic sheets at reasonable prices should be available to all. Better seeds should be provided. Cheap and efficient farm machines to replace manual work that requires physical strength should be made available in the market. Better medical system should be established. The local government should monitor provision of better medical services, better trained doctors and nurse. There is also demand for social safety net and a pension system.

Another article entitled 'Restructuring of economy and the role of women in economic development' by Yasodha Shanmugasundaram, Professional Fellow, Institute of Advance Studies and Research, Madras has elaborately discussed about the concept of economic regress focal variables are women based and also Globalisation – Adjustment Policy and women.

On another article titled 'Development Strategies and Experiences' by Smita Mishra of Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand has very elaborately discussed on this issue. She refers that countries like India and other low growth economics, on the other hand incidence of rural poverty and

landlessness is high, due to pressure created for people to move into non-agricultural sector into urban squatter settlements. These are both growth in rural and urban poverty. In urban areas, livelihoods are created in the informal sector or small enterprises and people have less access to clean water, sewage and other public services. In spite of women's significant economic contribution to the formal as well as the informal sectors women throughout the Asia region suffer from unequal access to education, training work of their choice and decision-making role in the society at their choice and decision-making roles in the society at large. These is growing evidence that rapid economic growth and economic restructuring affect women the most in term of lower wages, longer hours of work, greater competition in the labour market and dependence on casual labour for family survival. Another important impact of development which is market-led is the decline of natural resources. Environmental degradation has affected many indigenous communities (of those based on hunting etc). Women are affected more because of their role in social production. As a result, women have to work long hours, have heavier workloads are victims of poor nutrition and fail in health.

**Status of Women**

Women's rights are entitlements and freedoms claimed for women and girls of all ages in many societies. The idea is that women should have equal rights with men.

In some places these rights are institutionalized or supported by law, local custom, and behavior, whereas in others they may be ignored or suppressed. They differ from broader notions of human rights through claims of an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls in favour of men and boys.

Issues commonly associated with notions of women's rights include, though are not limited to, the right to bodily integrity and autonomy; to vote (suffrage); to hold public office; to work; to fair wages or equal pay; to own property; to education; to serve in the military or be conscripted; to enter into legal contracts; and to have marital, parental and religious rights.

In, India, the history speaks that the women are considered as a divine force but the multicultural indian society placed the women at different positions. Thus, there is no uniform status of women in the indian society. However, civilization showed the overall upliftment of women's position. According to historian Romila Thaper, "*Within the Indian society there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverting according to cultural malices, family structure, class, caste, property right and morals.*"

The Indian philosophy poses the women with dual character. On the one hand, she is considered futile, patient and benevolent but on the other hand, she is considered aggressor and represents 'Shakti'. In Post- Independence period the constitution of India was enacted in which women have been given a very distinctive position under its various Articles, which are as follows:

# Periodic Research

## Constitutional provisions

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

## Legal provisions

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

Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'murder', 'robbery', 'cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'crime against women'. These are broadly classified under two categories.

- (1) The crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) are
  - (i) Rape law (Sec. 376 IPC)
  - (ii) Kidnapping & abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373)
  - (iii) Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC)
  - (iv) Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC)
  - (v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)
  - (vi) Sexual harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)
  - (vii) Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age)
  - (viii) Obscene acts and songs (Sec.294)
- (2) The Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL)

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

- (1) The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- (2) The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
- (3) The Family Courts Act, 1954
- (4) The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- (5) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- (6) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
- (7) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- (8) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
- (9) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- (10) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- (11) The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976
- (12) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

- (13) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- (14) The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983
- (15) The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986
- (16) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- (17) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- (18) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

## Special initiatives for Women.

National Commission for Women and State Commission for Women National Commission for Women was constitute on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1992, under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990. National Commission for Women Act, 1990 is a statute having the potential to catalyse all the arms of the state under parliamentary democracy i.e., the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, though much power could make the commission an effective instrument to be of substantive assistance to the aggrieved women. The government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

National Commission for Women identified some areas in dealing with women concerns. They are:

- (1) Speedy justice for women (through Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalat)
- (2) Legal awareness programme for women colleges
- (3) Custodial Justice
- (4) Steps towards rehabilitation of women and child in prostitution
- (5) Widows
- (6) Blind women
- (7) Destitute and
- (8) Anti-arrack Campaign.

## Objectives of National Commission for Women

One of the chief objectives of the National Commission for Women is to ensure the safety and security of all women, as a prelude towards their progress and development. National Commission for Women tries to explore every possibility for prevention of crime and also bring to book the criminals who have perpetrated such crime as rape, bribe burning and dowry deaths. But this is no easy task. (4)

The National Commission for Women (NCW) in April 2012 launched a 24X7 toll free helpline for women in Ahmadabad, Gujarat. This helpline is being run by an NGO Ahmadabad Women Action Group (AWAG). The helpline has been launched on a pilot basis. (5)

In Assam, on 24th November, 1993 on the occasion of Women's Day during the "Quami Ekta" week the Assam Government also promulgated an Ordinance for constitution of the State Commission for women. Finally on 25th January, 1994 the state government had passed the Act in the state legislative assembly and the state government constituted a nine member committee. Hence the Assam State Commission for Women came into existence in the year 1994.

# Periodic Research

The Assam State Commission for Women has a wide ranging mandate and has been empowered with the powers to have a say on any matters related to the women especially in the fields of education, health, socio-economic aspects, legal justice and so on aiming at economic and social upliftment of women setting the goal of raising the status of women.

## **(1) Reservation for Women in Local Self - Government**

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas. The 81<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill, which aims to provide 33% reservation in parliament and state legislative assemblies is the government's response to the persistent demand of the women organizations is yet to pass due to differences between different political parties and yet unable to meet in a general consensus. As the women movement wants the bill to be passed without any objection as soon as possible because it considers the passing of the bill and making reservation constitutional provisions.

## **(2) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000)**

The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

## **(3) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001**

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

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women has set certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The objectives of the 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 by women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- Equal access of 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 practice by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. Building and strengthening

partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organization.

## **(4) Vision for the XII Five Year Plan**

The vision for the XII Five Year Plan is to ensure improving the position and condition of women by addressing structural and institutional barriers as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming.

## **Goals for the XII Five Year Plan**

- (5) Creating greater 'freedom' and 'choice' for women by generating awareness and creating institutional mechanisms to help women question prevalent "patriarchal" beliefs that are detrimental to their empowerment.
- (6) Improving health and education indicators for women like maternal mortality, infant mortality, nutrition levels, enrolment and retention in primary, secondary and higher education.
- (7) Reducing the incidence of violence against women and providing quality care services to the victims.
- (8) Improving employability of women, work participation rates especially in the organised sector and increased ownership of assets and control over resources.
- (9) Increasing women's access to public services and programmes through establishing and strengthening convergence mechanisms at multiple levels, creation of physical infrastructure for women and improving the capacity of women's organizations and collectives.
- (10) Ensuring that the specific concerns of single and disadvantaged women are addressed.

## **The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) 2010**

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round Development of women.

It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the Government for Women under aegis of various Central Ministries. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programmes for women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority.

## **Mission Statement**

NMEW will achieve gender equality, and gender justice and holistic development of women through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes relating to women, forging synergy between various stakeholders and creating an enabling environment conducive to social change.

# Periodic Research

Focus areas of the mission.

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12
- Higher and professional education for girls/women
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women.

## Key Strategies

- Facilitating inter-sector convergence of schemes meant for women, monitor and review the progress on regular basis
- Strengthening institutional framework offering support service for women
- At policy level commission research, evaluation studies, review schemes, programmes and legislation, do gender audit and outcome assessment to build the evidence for policy and programme reform and scale up implementation of the initiatives
- Enhance economic empowerment of girls and women through skill development, micro credit, vocational training and entrepreneurship and SHG development
- Evolve with the support of community representatives and groups appropriate and localized communication to strengthen public education on gender, behavior change and social mobilization using 360 degree approach on media and communication.

## Gender Budgeting

It is a budget that acknowledges the gender pattern in society and allocates money to implement policies and programmes that will change these patterns in a way that moves gender equal society.

Aims of Gender Budgeting

- Classes Groups/ improves links between policy pronouncements, resources allocation and outcomes on gender equality.
- Key tool for sensation of various stakeholders.
- Government tool for effective policy implementation.
- Committee for Gender mainstreaming: monitors beneficiary orientated schemes of Ministers

By providing all these legal provisions and remedies it was hoped that women would be at par with men in all walks of life. But the present condition shows that true equality has become an illusion for Indian women and inequality has continued in every sphere in intent and practice. As mentioned above, Indian law has granted political and economic freedom to women, but a change in the social status of women is a pre-requisite for complete enjoyment of these freedoms. Women in India are still victims of exploitation, violence and all sorts of discrimination.

But to know the intensity of the problems we must look into those problems and the ultimate solution.

## Violation of Women Rights

Today violence against women in India has assumed an alarming proportion. According to one estimate, there are about thirty specific forms of violence being committed against women from the pre-natal stage to their death. Such forms include foeticide, infanticide, deliberate check on the supply of sufficient or/and nutritious food, medicine neglect, deprivation of educational opportunities, child marriages, sexual abuse of the girl child, forced marriages, rapes, prostitution, sexual harassment, pregnancies at small intervals, wife-battering, bride-burning, cursing the widows, witch-hunting, neglect of the old women, etc. One can see these forms of violence in his or her own surroundings. These are also reported in newspapers and other media very frequently. Violence against women has serious consequences for their physical and mental health. Abused women are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, eating problems, and sexual dysfunctions. Consequences such as HIV/AIDS or unplanned pregnancies may in themselves act as risk factors for further aggression, forming a cycle of abuse. Effect of violence may also be fatal as a result of intentional murder, severe injury or suicide.

**United Nation define Violation against Women as "Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."**

Violence against women is one of the crimes against women which are linked to their disadvantageous position in the society. Domestic violence is one of its kinds. It refers to violence against women especially in matrimonial homes. Therefore domestic violence is recognized as the significant barriers of the empowerment of women, with consequences of women's health, their health seeking behavior and their adoption of small family norm. Generally speaking domestic violence implies physical or psychological domination of a family member by another member or partner. Its most recognized form is spousal abuse, which includes physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, economic deprivation or threats of violence. It is only in the last 30 years that such spousal violence against women has emerged as. There is no definition of domestic violence in Indian law.

Violence against women is a crime whether committed behind domestic walls, in public spaces or in conflict zones. Violence against women - physical and mental - exists not only in rural areas but also in the cities and urban areas. Despite a plethora of legislations the conviction rate of crime against women is very low in India. In Assam during (1992-97): 3127 cases targeting minor girls (below 14 years) was registered, of these: kidnapping - 2027 (64.82%), rape - 767 (average 10/month), molestation - 240,

# Periodic Research

torture or cruelty – 62, and murder -12. According to the study of all child labour in Guwahati, 16.73% were girls. 53.85% of child labour were domestic girl servants. (6)

In India the Domestic Violence act, 2005 which came into force on October 26, 2006, can prove to be life saver for the aggrieved women of the country. This is an act which provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution that are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. However specialized training for law enforcement authorities as well as medical and legal professional and the establishment of community support service for victims, including access to information and shelter should stressed upon for the act to give the expected result.

There are different kinds of violence against women. They are – Dowry Death, Female foeticide, Incest, Cruelty and molestation, Acid throwing, Eve teasing, Divorce, Trafficking, Child Marriages, Honour killings, Sexual harassment at work place, Witchcraft hunting, Malnutrition and the feminization of poverty.

### **Is Empowerment a Protective Factor?**

A large percentage of women are not empowered to take decisions, even related to their own life independently. They have to take permission of the male members in the family for each and every matter. Even for important household matters and in matters of their own marriage they cannot act independently.

It is clear that if women are to attain justice in society it is necessary that the structures of subordination are transformed i.e. changes in law, civil courts, social and legal institutions that underwrite male control and privileged. (7)

The Women in India has realized that without empowerment of women and without their direct involvement in policy formulation and policy execution, speedy emancipation is not possible. So, there is need to adopt the empowerment approach to tackle women's problem.

Empowerment of women means equal status to women. It is a multi- dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives communities and their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowering women socio-economically through increased awareness of their rights and duties as well as access to resources is a decisive step towards greater security for them. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, economic spheres and at various levels, such as individual, group and community. Empowerment of Women involves many things-economic opportunity i.e. Increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, property rights, political representation, social equality, better health care for women and children, personal rights, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standard of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-control. According to Report of Government of India, "**Empowerment**

**means moving from a position of enforced powerless to one of power."**

The question that often needs to be answered is that, in a society where men control the destiny of women how is it possible to empower women? The answer is, it is affirmative. One thing must be made clear that by empowering women, the society is not doing any disfavor to the male psyche. In fact, it liberates men more than it liberates women.

Of course, the term 'women's empowerment' means many things to many people, depending on their ideological position and their preconceived notions about a woman's role in society. For example, though right-wing politicians also now speak about women's empowerment, they clearly state that it should not be at the "cost" of women fulfilling their role as mothers.

As this example shows, an understanding of 'women's empowerment' is clouded by the inability to differentiate between sex and gender roles. Sex or biological roles mark the fundamental differences between women and men. Gender or social roles are extremely variable and are determined by social, economic, political and cultural forces.

The boundary between these determinants is the subject of much debate. What can be said with certainty is that gender roles are not fixed. They vary across the world, within countries, and within castes and classes. In other words, gender roles can be changed.

If one accepts this position and the principle that gender roles must be changed to ensure equality and equity to women, the term 'women's empowerment' becomes easier to understand -- it means women acquiring the power to think and act freely, so that they can exercise choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society.

The United Nations development fund for Women (UNIFEM) includes the following factors in its definition of women's empowerment:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change.

### **The link between women's empowerment and overall development.**

Women's empowerment has to be a core part of any development strategy as, apart from being denied equal status; women bear the brunt of poverty in poor societies. In many, if not most rural poor families in India, women do more physical labour than men, eat less, have less access to health and education facilities, get less wages, and bear the major part of the responsibility of bringing up children and looking after the family. This enormous contribution goes largely unrecognized. Women are

even denied a role in household (let alone village) decision-making.

Empowering women is thus clearly a basic human rights issue. It is also an issue linked closely to reducing poverty. There is a large body of evidence to show that empowerment of women leads to better progress in poverty reduction.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of Women. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- (1) Having decision-making power of their own
- (2) Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision.
- (3) Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- (4) Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- (5) Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- (6) Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- (7) Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- (8) Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- (9) Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma etc.

Some of the ways of Empowerment needs to be properly looking after, so that the process could speed up as early as possible.

### **(1) Empowering women through education**

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends.

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

Education has far-reaching effects. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each

child. Education of the women is very effective tool for women's empowerment not only from the point of view of literacy, but it has inter-linkage with other social parameters viz. population growth, health care, education of children etc. It enables rural women to acquire new knowledge and technology, required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields. Besides availing new opportunities and combating emerging challenges of dynamic society. Female education is essential for higher standards of health and improved 'maternal competence' which leads to lower infant mortality and also birth control. It also raises women's economic productivity. Besides having fewer children, mothers with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate.

### **(2) Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment of women is based on their participation in decision making process with regard to raising and distribution of resources, i.e. incomes, investments and expenditure at all levels. The entire effort of empowering women is to help them to exercise their rights in decision making at all levels and in every sphere both within and outside the household as equal partners in the society. There are different means through which economic empowerment could be achieved. They are:

#### **(a) Empowering women through entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship development among women could prove a suitable approach for economic empowerment. Women entrepreneur could be a women or group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise that facilitates her access to resources and markets actual ownership and active control. Thus, a women entrepreneur is economically more powerful than as a mere worker. She is more independent and having the control over the resources and financially more sound and independent as a mere worker.

Women entrepreneur may define as the women or group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. Govt. of India has defined women entrepreneur to those who owned at least 51% share in the capital of the enterprises and at least 51% employment generation by the enterprises should be for women only. (8)

As there are a lot of problems in Entrepreneurs, as – financial constrains, inefficient arrangement, over dependence on intermediaries, scarcity of raw materials, stiff competition, high cost of production, low mobility, family responsibility, social status, low ability to bear risk, lack of education, low need for achievement and absence of ambition for the achievement.

The above problems need to be address. Government and public enterprise should offer ancillary units to women entrepreneurs. Government can adopt some measures such as – Setting up of Financial cell, Marketing Co-operatives, Supply of raw materials, Education and awareness including Training facilities etc.

## (b) Empowerment of Women through SHGs

As majority of Indian Women residing in rural areas and urban slums are leading a hand to mouth existence and for this they depend on agriculture and they form the informal sector with little or no legislative protection and trade union support. So, here the role of SHG (Self help group) is important. SHGs have been fast emerging as a powerful and feasible alternate banking structure to cater to the credit needs of its members, mostly women. The democratic, flexible women friendly procedures and credit delivery mechanisms make the SHGs favorable to this economically weaker section particularly women. This system and the structure suit the purpose of easy access and timely credit to meet their needs and also offers them the dignity, they deserve. It also helps the women free from the money – lenders and the merciless local bankers.

## (c) Empowerment of Women through agricultural and non- agricultural activities.

Indian rural women have prominent role in agriculture sector. But there is still need to evaluate their role and status in a proper perspective. This is particularly true in the context of rural women remaining relatively poor, malnourished and economically less organized. Another dimension, the agrarian social structure is conditional essentially by the extent and character of property structure and land which forms the basis of the production relations within the socio- economic framework. Women per se largely do not have names to property or landed property within the patriarchal framework and that much a major deterrent in benefitting from institutional credit facilities.

It is true that women actively participate in farm work; they remain as the invisible force. The role assigned to them in economic sphere and social status is not commensurate either with their population size or by the immense role they play in agriculture and allied activities. There is no work sphere in agriculture or allied activities that women are not participating and contributing. The scope for gainful employment of women in non- agricultural activities is dwindling; the only comfort is the ever wide scope in potential for increasing production and productivity in agriculture and allied activities. There is vast scope in agriculture and allied activities in generating employment for women. They are – in Dairy farming, Poultry farming, Sheep, Goat and Pig farming, Fishery etc.

But it is true that empowering women in agriculture as well as allied activities calls for appropriate technology for farm women, recounting education towards increasing vocationalization in agriculture and allied activities.

## Empowerment of women through Political Empowerment

Equitable representation of women in the highest decision making body, the Parliament is a serious effort to build broad- based consensus to provide equitable representation to women in State Assemblies and Parliament. The power of decision-making is a real test of empowerment of women.

The idea of reserving seats to women was mooted by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as early as in the late 1980's. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women suggested that a 30 per cent quota for women be introduced at all levels of elective bodies. Women's group insisted that reservation be restricted to the Panchayat level to encourage grass roots participation in politics. The consensus around this demand resulted in the adaptation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1993. In 1995, the question of quotas was raised again, but this time the focus was on reservation of Women in Parliament.

The latest development which is taking place is that, the Women's Reservation Bill ensuring 33 per cent reservation has been passed by Rajya Sabha on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2010. But, till then 2012 the Women reservation Bill (108<sup>th</sup> amendment Bill 2008) is not yet pass due to differences among political parties in lok sabha.. The general feeling among the women members as well as in Indian society is that the issue has been hanging fire for too long. The purpose of the bill is not just to ensure entry into the highest decision making bodies of the country but also a positive step towards gender justice and social reforms. The need of the hour is that the government should bring legislation before the Parliament with a consensus among political parties without diluting the real spirit. Unless there is a reservation, women will find it difficult to get elected in larger number.(12)

Currently, in Parliament there are 58 (10.7%) women legislators out of 543 Legislators in the Lok Sabha and 23 (9.5%) out of a total of 243 in the Rajya Sabha. A recent World Bank Development Report titled 'Gender Equality and Development' emphasized the importance of political and economic empowerment of women as a contribution to sustainable growth and responsible government

This is also true that at political level only a microscopic minority of women, at the helm of affairs can affect the change in the life of women. It is the economic and social empowerment of women that need to be given greater importance.

## Women in Panchayats

Reservation for women in the Panchayats has definitely succeeded in improving the functioning in women and in bringing their leadership qualities to the forefront. However, women's reservation in panchayats has not broken the back of patriarchy. Men, threatened by the possibility of a shift in gender powers (90% of Panchayat secretaries are males), are dismissive about women leaders and do not like to deal with them. Caste bias is also clear in the case of SC/ST women representatives. This makes it difficult for the elected women representatives to function. Sometimes these women sarpanches would just find themselves locked out of their office.

## Way ahead

- Increase in women's participation at all levels: social, economic and political.
- Awareness of women's rights – by the State, civil society organizations, as well as the public at large.

# Periodic Research

- Gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming within State agencies and civil society organizations.

## State initiatives to be taken in India

- Police initiatives to introduce a more rights-based approach to women's issues (gender training etc).
- More government schemes for the girl child.
- Institutionalizing safety of women and girls.
- Changing policy into law – initial stages: sexual harassment at the workplace guidelines and child sexual abuse draft bill.

## Conclusion

Since Independence, the Government of India has enacted a constitutional and legal framework and has developed institutional mechanism to enable improvement in the living condition of women and Children. The basic provision of the Indian Constitution that guarantee justice, liberty and equality to all citizen and the specific article and amendments that have been enacted to ensure that women enjoys the constitutional rights that assure their participation in society as equal partners provide the framework for women development in India. But merely legislation and constitutional provision are not enough; true emancipation is required at individual levels. Legislation means can however be a short term remedy or fascinator. It is only through empowerment of women that development of a society and the nation is possible. Not only the removed of inequality and imbalance but improvement in the quality and standard of the women should be our goal.

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Of course efforts by the Government are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. Much more needs to be done in redistributing productive assests in employment, education and other spheres. By providing reservation, the rulers claim that they have 'empowered' the women. In fact this is half done on the part of the whole. There is yet to be done a lot.

If women are to be empowered, it is necessary to provide support services. If women are to be economically empowered, they are to be provided with additional channels of credit, training, emphasis on management skills and social security. And if women are to be politically empowered, the imperative is to resort to different form of affirmative discrimination, such as quotas of reservation in various political apparatus, to enable them to participate in decision making process. Women have to be given access to knowledge, power and resources. If women are to be person in their own right, they must be in control of their own bodies.

Addition to this one more important aspect in this regard is that, there is need for change of mindset of people with regard to women in accordance with the changing socio- economic and political spectrum in and around the country. This change of mindset can be facilitated by sensitizing and thereafter galvanizing the people on women issues. Therefore every effort should be made for women empowerment in the various administrations, political and economic perspective to ensure to preserve women's rights. In the last, statement of **Swami Vivekananda** may be remembered. He says

***"Country and Nation which do not respect women have never become great nor will ever be in future."***

## References

- (1) Patel Krishna Ahooja, Article in ' Economic and Political Weekly' Feb. 1993.
- (2) The Hindu, dated 20-01-13.
- (3) Menon-Sen Kalyani. Shiva Kumar A.K. (2000) "Women in India: How free? How Equal?" United Nations, Archived from the original on 11 Sept.2006.
- (4) Giri V. Mohini (1998) "Emancipation and Empowerment of women" published by Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi-02, p-p 50-52.]
- (5) Sharma Mamta. An Article published entitled "NCW: Twenty Years of Empowerment Women". Yojana June 2012. P-11).
- (6) Dr. Jeuti Baruah, Director, Law Research Institute. Gauhati High Court.
- (7) Bapat, Meera and Sheela Patel. 'Economic and Politically Weekly', 13 March 1993. P.466.
- (8) Amin M. Mir. An Article entitled "Entrepreneurship development: An approach to economic empowerment of women." Kurukshetra. Sept.2008. P-29).
- (9) Rathore Madhu and Dr. Singh Suman. An Article entitle "Women Enterprise: A Step towards success." Kurukshetra. Jan. 2008. P-9).
- (10) Dr. Manimekalal K. An Article entitled "Economic Empowerment of Women through Self-Help Groups." Third Concept. Feb 2004. P - 50).
- (11) Sethi, RM. Women in Agriculture. Rawat Publications, New Delhi).
- (12) Shiri Rai. Class, Caste and Gender – Women in Parliament in India