

Chapter - 3

THE IDEA OF EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A PAN-INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Chapter – 3

THE IDEA OF EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A PAN-INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Introduction (Meaning of Empowerment)

Before discussing about the empowerment of women, one does need to understand the exact meaning of the word 'empowerment'. According to Cambridge English Dictionary, empowerment means "to authorize". So, in the context of the people they have to be authorized to have control over their lives. When applied in the context of development the particular segment of population "empowered" means to have control over their lives to better their socio-economic and political conditions.

The concept of empowerment, in predominant theory of democracy, means equal influence and individual autonomy. In a predominantly integrative theory of democracy, empowerment means transforming individuals into citizens. According to Herschman (1970), empowerment may be viewed from existence and voice of options. The existence option in a real sense is logically linked to economic life. The voice option is introduced as a supplementary means of empowerment linked to family life and political life, choosing between the two. Hirst Paul (1994), was in favour of exist option.

So, there is a great debate on the meanings and issues of empowerment. One of the major issues in the debate on empowerment is to do with its definition. The term "empowerment" is used across a wide range of disciplines and each brings differing interpretations. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "the action of empowering; the state of being empowered." It was first used in this form in 1849. However, the verb "empower" from which this noun is derived was first apparent in the English Language somewhere in two hundred years before. The word "empower" is of French and Latin derivation consisting of the preposition "em" and the noun "power". "Em" probably comes from the Old French for "en" - they were, at one time, interchangeable words meaning "in". The Latin source of "em" is,

"power". "Em" probably comes from the Old French for "en" - they were, at one time, interchangeable words meaning "in". The Latin source of "em" is, however, more complicated. "Em" and "en" also held the same definition - to "look" or to "come". This provokes interesting thought as to modern interpretations of the word "empowerment" but it is more likely that its origin lies with the preposition "in" which denoted space and was defined as "into; onto; towards or against". This form of the Latin would explain the emergence of another spelling of the word - "impower". The first recorded use of the word "empower" and its derivations was in the Seventeenth Century by Hamon L'Estrange in his book 'The Reign of King Charles'.

Empowerment is the process through which an individual perceives that s/he controls his or her situation (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Bormann, 1988; Bullis, 1993; Buzzanell, 1995; Chiles & Zorn, 1995, 1991; Mumby, 1993; Pacanowsky, 1988; Papa, Ghanekar, & Singhal, 1997; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997; Scheibel, 1994). Fawcett and colleagues (1996) extend the concept of empowerment to the group and/or community level by defining empowerment as "the process of gaining influence over the events and outcomes of importance to an individual, group, or community". Albrecht (1988) discussed empowerment as a belief (i) that one can influence others to achieve specific outcomes, and (ii) that the process for achieving these outcomes is based on interactional communication behaviour, a perspective that we seek to extend in the present investigation. The concept of empowerment is similar to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997), and is the opposite of fatalism. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief that he/she is able to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. An empowered person actively engages in his/her environment, rather than passively reacting to events over which the individual feels s/he has no control. A collective of empowered individuals practices participatory decision-making (Cheney, 1995), through which the collectivity encourages individuals to become more empowered. Bandura (1997) has recently conceptualized collective efficacy, which is expressed in collectivistic-oriented systems in which people work together to achieve the

benefits that they seek. Such collective efficacy rests on the individual self-efficacy of the members of the collectivity who collaborates in order to organize and execute the courses of group actions that produces desired ends. Collective self-efficacy, thus, rests on individual self-efficacy of the members. The successful expression of collective efficacy can build individual self-efficacy. He stated: " 'Empowerment' is not something bestowed through edict. It is gained through development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental constraints guarded by those whose interests are served by them. Those who exercise authority and control do not go around voluntarily granting to others power over resources and entitlements in acts of beneficence. A share of benefits and control must be negotiated through concerted effort and, oftentimes, through prolonged struggle. Equipping people with a firm belief that they can produce valued effect by their collective action and providing them with the means to do so are the key ingredients in an enablement process".

The World Bank's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook defines empowerment in its broadest sense as the "expansion of freedom of choice and action" (Narayan, 2002). United Nations (2001) defines empowerment as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Kabeer's (1998) view of empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. The fundamentals of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer, 2001). Kabeer points out that a distinction has to be made about the type of choice, and the focus necessarily has to be on strategic life choices, that is choices that shape livelihoods or are 'critical for people to live the lives they want'. The expansion in the range of potential choices available to women includes three inter-related dimensions that are inseparable in determining the meaning of an indicator and hence its validity as a measure of empowerment. These dimensions are (i) Resources: The precondition necessary for women to be able to exercise choice; women must

have access and future claims to material, human and social resources; (ii) Agency: The process of decision-making, including negotiation, deception and manipulation that permit women to define their goals and act upon them; (iii) Achievements: The well-being outcomes that women experience as a result of their access to resources and agency. Mayoux's (2000) definition of empowerment relates more directly with power, as "a multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations". It consists of: (i) 'Power within', enabling women to articulate their own aspirations and strategies for change; (ii) 'Power to', enabling women to develop the necessary skills and access the necessary resources to achieve their aspirations; (iii) 'Power with', enabling women to examine and articulate their collective interests, to organize, to achieve them and to link with other women and men's organizations for change; and (iv) 'Power over', changing the underlying inequalities in power and resources that constrain women's aspirations and their ability to achieve them. These power relations operate in different spheres of life (e.g., economic, social, political) and at different levels (e.g., individual, household, community, market, institutional).

Wilkinson (1990) argues empowerment is the process in which people assume an increased involvement in defining and promoting their own agenda for political and social projects designed to intact change.

Hape (1994) said that the empowerment is autonomy both in collective and individual levels. It 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 self and society, and of personal needs, of socio-economic resources, realization of one's capabilities and potential and confidence to take decision are components of empowerment. To women, empowerment is the restructuring of gender relation within family and society.

Batliwala (1994) said that the empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power.

Oakley (1991) argues empowerment is the development of skills and abilities to enable rural people and to manage better, and have a say in development process.

Institute of Socio-economic Development (1991) Empowerment is a process to participate affectively in decisions that affect women's lives at the family, community and higher level of political process

Sharma (1992) defines empowerment as a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections.

Pandey (1993) said empowerment is a process of building capacity and confidence for taking decisions about one's own life at an individual and collective level, gaining control over productive resources. The empowerment process is facilitated by creating awareness about one's life and responsibilities in socio-economic and political fields.

Sorensen (1997) said empowerment means giving autonomy and control over one's life. The empowered person becomes agents of their own development, and able in decision making and are able to challenge and change their subordinated position in society in respect of socio-economic and political matters.

Leiten (1992) argued that a true emancipatory movement not only in economic resources but in political and social process has been variously labeled as empowerment.

Banerjee (1995) said empowerment implies a fundamental redistribution of power between different groups. It is a process of equality enhancement and can be achieved through disempowering some structure, system, process and institutions. Empowerment as an enabling process for equality demonstrates selectivity, unevenness, self-generated momentum and compulsions. Empowerment is the vehicle which enables women to renegotiate their existence.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) opined that empowerment means different things to different people. They have defined empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the

identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. "The term empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationship."

According to Bhowmik (2003) the empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave and take action and central work in an autonomous way. It is the process, by which can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of their lives. Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation.

The World Bank (2001) defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is the actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improves the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets." Thus, as the World Bank (2001) report confirm, societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pays the cost of greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower living standard of their people. The World Bank also identifies four key elements of empowerment to draft institutional reforms: access to information; inclusion and participation; accountability; and local organisational capacity.

According to Krishna (2003) empowerment means increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make effective development and life choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes. It is by nature a process and/or outcome. Social capital, on the other hand, features social organisation such as networks, norms and inter-personal trust that

facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. It is by nature a stock. And Community Driven Development (CDD) is a methodology of undertaking development enterprises that gives control of decisions and resources to community groups. It is by nature an activity.

Malhotra (2004) said that empowerment as conceptualised by Moser, Kabeer, Batliwala and Rowlands can broadly be categorized as coming from the individual end of the continuum. Here empowerment is located within the notions of 'power-within', 'power-with', and 'power-to', which conceptualise power in variable sum terms. From this perspective, the total amount of power in society is seen as variable and residing with members of society as a whole. In fact, it is seen as involving the capacity and the right to act, termed as 'legitimate capacity, by Parson. Based on the concept, empowerment can be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effects upon the power of the powerful. Once empowered, they can share in the fruits of development become agents of their own development and in process achieving self-reliance.

Empowerment is defined by Moser as 'the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and non-material resources.'

Empowerment is defined by Oakley as 'power as a result of increasing access to economic resources, such as credit input'.

For Kabeer empowerment is 'the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability'.

Personal empowerment for Rowlands is key to the entire empowerment process, and involves fundamental psychological and psychosocial processes and changes. She views empowerment process as dynamic, aimed at finding 'more spaces for control' and encompassing changes at the personal, relational and collective levels.

In their respective conceptualizations of empowerment, Price, Friedmann, Johnson and Young can be categorised as leaning towards the political end of the continuum. Here the notion of empowerment signifies

'power-over', which conceptualizes power in zero-sum terms. It is seen as a 'capacity to act' and is conceived as a quantitative phenomenon that is used as an instrument for domination.

Wallerstein N., Bernstein E., (1994) describe empowerment as "a process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their affairs" with community empowerment as a "a social action process by which individuals, communities, and organizations gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life."

Narayan D. (2002) defines empowerment as "expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives."

Freire P. (1970) said empowerment is an action-oriented concept with a focus on removal of formal or informal barriers, and on transforming power relations between communities, institutions and governments. It is based on an assumption of community cultural assets that can be strengthened through dialogue and action. It is exercised in various domains, from personal through political and collective action. (Laverack G. 2004) argued that the empowerment has sometimes been used interchangeably with community capacity (Goodman RM, 1998), or social capital (Putman R., 1995), though, unlike social capital, empowerment focuses on power relations and intervention strategies. Empowerment includes both processes and outcomes. After much discussion, we can define empowerment as having a number of qualities, and are as follows:

1. A feeling that the individual can make a difference.
2. Seeing things differently and logically.
3. Learning to think critically.
4. Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.
5. Having access to information and resources.
6. Growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated.
7. Development of learning skills.

8. Effecting change in one's life and one's community.
9. Having a range of options from which to make choices.
10. Learning the conditioning.
11. Having decision-making power.
12. Understanding that people have rights.
13. Not feeling alone; feeling part of a group.

In a nutshell we can conclude that the empowerment has been conceptualized differently by different writers. The concept of empowerment is used in many ways and in a wide range of context, and is applied by organisations of differing world views and political persuasions. The term 'empower' is referred to 'to give power or authority to'. Much has been said and discussed about the empowerment concept. Yet, despite the volumes of material generated, a unanimous decision on the meaning of empowerment has not been reached.

3.2 Women Empowerment

Since the 1990s women have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programs (World Bank, 2001). If we follow the definition of empowerment given by Kabeer which reads "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" then the meaning of women empowerment will be effective one. For women in India, this suggests empowerment in several realms: personal, familial, economic and political. Increasing personal efficacy lies at the heart of empowerment. Female empowerment is the process of building a woman's capacity to be self-reliant and to develop her sense of inner strength (Bandura, 1997).

Since the 1980s the Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women (Collier, 1998). International organizations like the World Bank and United Nations have focused on women's issues especially the empowerment of poor women in rural areas. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken on an increased role in the area of women's empowerment (Sadik, 1988). NGO's, previously catering to women's health and educational need, have moved beyond this traditional focus to addressing the underlying causes of deprivations through promoting the economic and social empowerment of women (McNamara, 2003).

Although the notion of women's empowerment has long been legitimized by international development agencies, but what actually comprises empowerment, and how it is measured, is debated in the development literature. Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) provide an excellent review of this debate. They review the many ways that empowerment can be measured and suggest that researchers pay attention to the process in which empowerment occurs. The frequently used Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite measure of gender inequality in three key areas: Political participation and decision-making, economic participation and decision-making and power over economic resources (HDR, 2003).

Malhotra (2002) constructed a list of the most commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors in different fields of social sciences. Allowing for overlap, these frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along multiple dimension, including: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Since these dimensions cover a broad range of factors, women may be empowered within one of these sub-domains. They give the example of "socio-cultural" dimension which covers a range of empowerment sub-domains, from marriage systems to norms regarding women's physical mobility, to non-familial social support systems and networks available to women.

Several efforts have been made in recent years to develop comprehensive frameworks delineating the various dimensions along which women can be empowered (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002). In this context the work of Hashemi (1996) and Amin Becker and Bayes, (1998), seems most relevant for the study.

Kabeer (1999), stresses that women's empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability. According to her, it is important to understand empowerment as a process and not an instrumentalist form of advocacy, which requires measurement and quantification of empowerment. Kabeer emphasizes that the ability to exercise choice incorporates three interrelated dimensions: resources (defined broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources); agency (including processes of decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation) and achievements (well-being outcomes). Kabeer further stresses that it is resources and agency together that constitute what Sen (1985) refers to as capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing' which are valued by people in a given context. 'Functioning' refers to all possible ways of 'being and doing', which are valued by people in a given context and of 'functioning achievements' to refer to the particular ways of being and doing which are realized by different individuals. If the failure to achieve valued ways of 'being and doing' can be traced to laziness, incompetence or individual preferences and priorities, then the issue of power is not relevant. It is only when the failure to achieve one's goals reflects some deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose that it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment.

Women's empowerment is model of gender analysis/development that traces women's increasing equality by empowerment through five phases, viz. welfare, access, conscientation, participation and control. Empowerment is a process whereby women can establish their control over various assets and which helps them to develop their self confidence. Empowerment is the way by

which women learn about their rights, duties and laws (Mondal, Sekh Rahim, 2005).

3.3 Review of Literature

A number of studies have been undertaken on women empowerment at the global level and in India. Some studies dealt on methodological issues and some on empirical analysis. Moser (1993) focused on the interrelationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and the implementation of gender planning and practices. The work of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. Anand and Sen (1995) tried to develop a measure of gender inequality. Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998) mainly emphasized on the methodology of construction, composition and determinant of GEM. Bardhan and Klasen (1999) criticized GEM as an inadequate index of measuring women empowerment at the aggregate level. Malhotra (2002) in their paper prepared for the World Bank highlighted methodological issues of measurement and analysis of women empowerment.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) in their paper used a policy of political reservation for women adopted in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decision. They found that women were more likely to participate in policy making process if the leader of the village community was happened to be women.

Mahanta (2002) sought to explain the question of women's access to or deprivation of basic human rights as the right to health, education and work, legal rights, rights of working women's, besides issues like domestic violence, all the while keeping the peculiar socio-cultural situation of the North East in mind. A workshop organized in 2003 by the Institute of Social Sciences and South Asia Partnership, Canada addressed the issues like "Proxy Women" who after being elected to Panchayat bodies were merely puppets in the hands of their husbands, relatives and other male Panchayat members; and emphasized

on training programme for their capacity building. Assam Human Development Report (Govt. of Assam, 2003) threw some light on inequality in the achievement between men and women of Assam in different spheres of life. The report viewed that poverty, violence and lack of political participation were the main issues of concern for South Asian Women, and Assam was no exception.

The study of Kishor and Gupta (2004) revealed that average women in India were disempowered relative to men, and there had been little change in her empowerment over time. Parashar (2004) examined how mother's empowerment in India is linked with child nutrition and immunization and suggested women to be empowered simultaneously along several different dimensions if they and their children were to benefit across the whole spectrum of their health and survival needs.

Sridevi (2005) in her paper provided a scientific method to measure empowerment. Study of Cote de Ivoire revealed that increased female share in household income leads to increased spending on human development enhancing items (as quoted by Ranis and Stewart, 2005). Blumberg (2005) viewed that economic empowerment of women was the key to gender equality and well-being of a nation. This would not only enhance women's capacity of decision making but also lead to reduction in corruption, armed conflict and violence against females in the long run.

Karat (2005) in her works discussed the issues of violence against women, their survival, political participation and emancipation. Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on the factor like women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence and opined that if development means expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress.

Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment. Deepa Narayan (2007) made an attempt to measure women empowerment for different countries and regions by using self-assessed points on a ten steps ladder of power and rights, where at the bottom of the ladder stood people

who were completely powerless and without rights and on the top stood those who had a lot of power and rights.

Figueras (2008) in her work studied the effect of female political representation in State legislature on public goods, policy and expenditure in the context of India and opined that politicians' gender and social position matters for policy. Barkat while discussing the present status of women in Bangladesh opined that although women as mothers are held in high respect at the individual level, there was an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making and control over her own life. (www.goodgovernance.org)

Thus, from the above review of literature it is evident that quite a number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related issues. Entire gamut of literature has centered mainly around conceptual and measurement issues and the constraints to women empowerment.

3.4 Women's Empowerment in Contemporary India

Over the three decades of the women's movement across India, we have seen an increasing emphasis on the promotion of grassroots-level organisations for women's development and discussions on women's status and empowerment. The phrase 'status of women', though a cliché, has its uses despite countrywide variations. But women empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms, since thousands of years. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation on the other hand just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in

India is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development.

Contemporary Indian society has been exposed to the broad processes of social transformation, agricultural modernization and economic development, urbanization and globalization. However, these processes have generated regional imbalances, sharpened class inequalities and augmented the gender disparities. Hence, women have become critical symbols of these growing imbalances. All these have affected adversely the various aspects of women's empowerment in the contemporary Indian society. The family and women's work is not enough to say that any society consists of men and women. It is equally important to look at how the two groups of people interact, as well as at the role and exceptions each group has of the other. Such roles and exceptions are a product of the stereotypes of each gender. By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with a gender. Thus, the first idea on gender role differences, which a child acquires, is that of women of one's family marrying and leaving their homes to live with different groups of people. Secondly, men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision making and are far more visible and audible than their wives. Thirdly, most of the tasks within the home are done by the mother, grand-mother, and sisters and so on. At meal times they carry food to the fields for the men. All these tasks, which consume time and energy, are not counted as work and there is no payment involved. In western countries, women's groups, politicians and other concerned individuals have been arguing for payment for house work and childcare. In India, the question of payment for household jobs has not really been an important issue or demand. As we shall see, there are many other issues, which require urgent attention. At the same time, it is important for us to remember that non-payment should not also mean non-recognition. The fact that women are expected to perform all these tasks as a part of their conventional roles and on special merit is awarded to them for these tiring and tiresome jobs.

But, empowerment is seen as a process where outcome would lead to renegotiation to gender relation, enhance women's access and control over

human, material, financial and intellectual resources. Empowerment of women section can be understood as a process which enables women to question and analyze the basis of their subordination, to articulate this problem, ways of addressing their problems and to take decisions, to make forward and act upon. Empowerment does not end with election but to decision making, planning, implementation of development programme, monitoring and evaluation of the programme and sharing the benefits of development. Women participation into politics at local level through reservation is certainly a positive development but to make it work needs sincere efforts from different quarters. Something more than participation is required to which the term empowerment focuses. It is concerned with women empowerment through ideas, education and consciousness. The empowerment is frequently stimulated theory participatory rural appraisal exercise giving women a clear sense of how they can improve upon their lives in particular way. Now, with the Constitutional and legislative support, it was hoped that the process of women empowerment would gather momentum, but despite various movements and legislative guarantee and despite the increase in out lay for development projects, women's empowerment remain to be achieved. Here, NGOs playing more effective roles and acting as a third sector of development and empowerment of women. Here are some important points where women need for empowerment.

The extent of empowerment of women in the national hierarchy is determined largely by the three factors - her economic, social and political identity and their weightage. These factors are deeply intertwined and interlinked with many cross cutting linkages which imply that if efforts in even one dimension remain absent or weak, outcomes and momentum generated by the other components cannot be sustained as they will not be able to weather any changes or upheavals. It is only when all the three factors are simultaneously addressed and made compatible with each other can the woman being truly empowered. Therefore for holistic empowerment of the woman to happen - social, economic and political aspects impacting a woman's life must converge effectively.

3.5 Status of women in India

The issue of the status of women in society has been a matter of intense scrutiny and debate all over the world. This is equally true of India, an essentially patriarchal society, where the goal of equality between men and women is actually guaranteed by the Country's Constitution. Despite this, there remains a great deal to be done to secure women's equal status in Indian society, especially when it comes to deprived or neglected groups. The concept that "women is as much as man and thus entitled to the same freedoms, rights and responsibilities" is yet to find universal acceptance inspite of the unequivocal assertion that women have complete and equal rights with men in every respect by the International Bill of Human Rights. The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality, liberty and dignity to the women of India. The preamble promises to secure to all its citizens justice- social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all, fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the integrity of the nation. But the real condition is that the majority of women are still not enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the Constitution.

3.6 Political Condition

Indian society may be regarded as a patriarchal society. But equality between men and women is guaranteed by the country's constitution. The National Perspective Plan for Women created a number of administrative agencies for implementing programmes for women's development. Despite this, there remains a great deal to be done to secure women's equal status in Indian society. After independence till date women in India have never held more than 9 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha. This 9 per cent comes out of nearly 50 per cent of the population. The percentage of women M.Ps. has remained in single figure mark almost in every Lok Sabha Election. In case of state legislatures, the situation is even more dismal as is clear from the fact that the average women's representation in them is just four per

cent (Subhas C. Arora, 2002). This is the figure of representation of women parliamentarians from first to fourteenth Lok Sabha Election:

Table No. 3.1 Representation of women Parliamentarians

Lok Sabha Elections	Total Seats	Women Candidates	Elected	Percentage
1952 (First)	499	51	22	4.4
1957 (Second)	500	45	27	5.4
1962 (Third)	503	70	34	6.7
1967 (Fourth)	523	67	31	5.9
1971 (Fifth)	521	86	22	4.2
1977 (Sixth)	544	70	19	3.4
1980 (Seventh)	544	142	28	5.1
1984 (Eighth)	544	164	44	8.1
1989 (Ninth)	517	198	27	5.2
1991 (Tenth)	544	325	39	7.8
1996 (Eleventh)	544	599	39*	7.8
1998 (Twelfth)	544	271	43*	8.8
1999 (Thirteenth)	542	250	57*	8.86
2004 (Fourteenth)	543	350	44	8.1

Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India.

Note: * One member nominated by the President.

The table shows that women representation in the country's highest decision-making body is so poor. It is clear from the table that women contesting elections is going up steadily over the years but this increase is not sufficient keeping in view the fact that there has been overall increase in the number of candidates both men and women. It is very clear that the success ratio of women contestants has steadily fallen over the years.

3.7 Literacy rate of women

Women are fighting for atrocities such as dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortions, health, poverty, education, gender disparity, trafficking,

sexual harassment, domestic violence, etc. Women today are educated but illiterate in terms of knowing their rights properly. Literacy rate is considered as one of the parameters for measuring the development of a country. The disparity between women and men in education is that men are considered to be the bread earner of the family, while the role of care taking is ascribed to that of women. As it is considered to be the responsibility of men to earn money, education is taken as the means to attend the end. And, at the same time care for the family is assumed to be the sole responsibility of women. The following represents the literacy rates of men and women in India.

Table No. 3.2 Literacy Rates in India

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-female gap in literacy rate
1951	18.33	27.16	7.90	19.26
1961	28.31	40.40	12.90	24.50
1971	34.45	45.95	18.44	27.51
1981	43.67	56.50	24.88	32.38
1991	52.21	64.13	39.43	25.30
2001	65.38	75.86	54.16	21.70

(Source: Census of India)

From the above table, it can be said that even after 50 years since 1951, the male- female gap in the literacy rate hasn't shown much marked changes. In such a situation, wherein about 46% of Indian women still illiterate, aspiring a developed country status for India and assuming that women in India are feeling good is nothing but a pipedream.

3.8 Employment Opportunity

A news item in a National daily follows "Double Postgraduates and Ph.D. holders for the constables' post"! Not surprising. Of the 205 women constables who passed out of the Kerala Policy Academy in Trissur, two are Ph. Ds, eight double post-graduates, 29 post-graduates and 122 are graduates (Babu,

Ramesh, 2003). It is fact that women are more unemployed and underemployed compared to their male counterparts.

3.9 Sex Ratio

Gender discrimination starts from the beginning of birth or even before birth of the child itself. Females of all ages face a gross neglect by the society throughout their lives. The birth of a girl child is considered to be a debt to be paid in the future whereas boys are considered as support at the old age. Therefore, to exempt from the burden of debt along with the interest of rearing the girl child, people prefer to abort the foetus in the very beginning.

Table No. 3.3 Sex Ratio in India: 1901-2001

Sl. No	Census Year	Sex Ratio
1	1901	972
2	1911	964
3	1921	955
4	1931	950
5	1941	945
6	1951	946
7	1961	941
8	1971	930
9	1981	934
10	1991	927
11	2001	933

(Source: Compiled from Census figures.)

Table shows that the number of women population in India is decreasing. It was 972 against 1000 men in 1901 and after one hundred year it is 933.

3.10 Health of women in India

Health is not mainly an issue of doctors, social services and hospitals. It is an issue of social justice. The National Health Policy, approved by Parliament in 1983 clearly indicates India's commitment to the good health for all by the year 2000 AD. The present state of health care is quite unsatisfactory and the goal to achieve 'health for all' is getting postponed. Considering the provision of health care services for women, previously all the measures were restricted

to child survival and safe motherhood programme. While assessing the health policy of the country, the Committee on Empowerment of Women recently observed: Anaemia, urinary tract infections, malnutrition, repeated child births, adolescent marriage and overwork take a heavy toll on women's lives. But their health and nutritional needs receive little focus. All healthcare programmes for women are tailored for pregnant and nursing mothers for achieving population stabilization (Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2000-01),

Table No. 3.4 Expectation of life at Birth by Sex

Sl No.	Year	Male	Female
1	1901	22.6	23.3
2	1911	19.4	20.9
3	1921	26.9	26.6
4	1931	32.1	31.4
5	1941	32.4	31.7
6	1951	41.9	40.6
7	1961	46.4	44.7
8	1971	50.9	50.7
9	1981	55.6	56.4
10	1991	60.6	61.7
11	2001	63.87	56.81

Source: Compile from Census Figure

The table shows that there has been considerable improvement in expectation of life at birth in India since independence. Yet, for the country as a whole, it was only in the beginning of the eighties that the expectation of life for women, which has been lagging behind that of men, improved substantially and the gap between men and women was not only gone, but women's expectation of life began to exceed that of men.

3.11 Darjeeling District of West Bengal and its Milieu

West Bengal was created as a constituent state of the Indian union on 15th August 1947. West Bengal has international borders with Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan, and has state borders with Sikkim, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and Assam. It has, therefore, three international frontiers to the

north, east and west. Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal, is the cultural hub of not only of eastern India but also of the northeastern part of the country. The total area of West Bengal is 88,752 sq. kms. Though it is small in size in comparison to some other states in the country, but it has a dense concentration of population. According to Census 2001, the total population of the state is 80,221,171, which is fourth in rank after Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar, but the population density is the highest in West Bengal, with 90.4 persons per sq. km. The population pressure in the state is the outcome of its socio-economic and political history. The sex ratio is 934, which is slightly higher than the all-India sex ratio. According to Census 2001, among the top ten populous districts of the country, five districts belong to West Bengal and out of the five, three districts North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and Murshidabad which share the international border with Bangladesh. In West Bengal, during the last decade, female literacy has increased from 46.6 per cent in 1991 to 60.22 per cent in 2001. There are 19 districts in West Bengal and Darjeeling is one among them.

The present study has covered the entire District of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal. The name Darjeeling is believed to be a derivation of 'Dorje,' the precious stone or ecclesiastical scepter, which is emblematic of the thunderbolt of Sakhra (Indra) and of 'ling', a place. It means, therefore, the place of the Dorje, the mystic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion, this being the name by which the Buddhist monastery which once stood on Observatory Hill was formerly known (O'malley, 1907). It is a frontier district, running up between Nepal and Bhutan and stretching from the plains of Bengal on the south to the state of Sikkim on the north. The Darjeeling district lies between 26° 31' and 27° 13' north latitude and between 87° 59' and 88° 53' east longitude. Geographically the district can be divided into two particular divisions, the hills and the plains. The hill area covers the entire hill subdivisions of Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong. The foothills of Darjeeling Himalayas come under the Siliguri subdivision and are also known as Terrain. The district comprises four subdivisions: Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri. Darjeeling Sadar consists of Darjeeling city

and three community development blocs: Darjeeling Pulbazar, Rangli Rangliot and Jorebunglow Sukiapokhri. Kalimpong subdivision consists of Kalimpong city and three community development blocs: Kalimpong -I, Kalimpong -II and Gorubathan. Kurseong subdivision consists of Kurseong city and two community development blocs: Mirik and Kurseong. Siliguri subdivision consists of Siliguri city and four community development blocks: Matigara, Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari. Darjeeling is the district headquarters. There are 17 police stations, 12 development blocks, 3 municipalities, 1 Municipal Corporation and 134 Gram Panchayats in this district. Each subdivision contains one municipality each (Siliguri has a municipal corporation instead) along with community development blocs which in turn are divided into rural areas with gram Panchayats and census towns. In total there are 9 urban units: 3 municipalities, 1 municipal corporation, 1 notified area and 4 census towns.

References

1. Anand, S. and A. Sen, (1995), "*Gender inequality in Human Development: Theories and Measurement*", in Fukuda Parr and A.K. Shiv Kumar (eds.) *Readings in Human Development*, OUP, New Delhi.
2. Annual Report (1998-99), GOI, Ministry of Rural Area and Employment, pp. 106-107.
3. Babu, Ramesh, (2003) *Women Constables in Kerala a qualified lot*, Hindusthan Times (New Delhi), November, p-8.
4. Bandura, A. (1977), *Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change*, Psychological Review, 84(2), pp. 191-215.
5. Bandura, A. (1986), *Social foundations of thought and action: A social-cognitive theory: Upper Saddle River, NJ*, Prentice-Hall.
6. Bandura, A. (1986), *Social foundations of thought*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall.
7. Bandura, A. (1997), *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, New York, Freeman.
8. Banerjee, N. K. (1995), *Grassroots empowerment (1975-1990)*, A discussion paper, Associational paper No. 22, Centre for Women's development studies, New Delhi.
9. Bardhan, K. and K. Stephan (1999), "*UNDP's Gender Related Indices: A Critical Review*", World Development, Vol. 27, No.6.
10. Blumberg, R.L. (2005), "*Women's Economic Empowerment as the Magic Potion of Development?*" American Sociological Association, Philadelphia.
11. Chattopadhyay, R. and E. Duflo, (2001), "*Women's Leadership and Policy Decisions: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomized Experiment in India*", Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta and Department of Economics, MIT, and NBER.
12. Committee on Empowerment of Women (2000-01), Fourth report submitted to the Lok Sabha on 30 August 2001.

13. Corinne L. Shefner-Rogers, Nagesh Rao, Everett M. Rogers, Arun Wayangankar (1998), *The empowerment of women dairy farmers in India*, Journal of Applied Communication Research, 26: 3, pp. 319-337.
14. Desai, N. and U. Thakkar, (2007), *Women and Political Participation in India*, *Women in Indian Society*, New Delhi, National Book Trust.
15. Eva Sorensen, (1997), *Democracy and Empowerment*, Public Administration, Vol. 75(3), Autumn, pp. 553-557.
16. Figueras, I.C. (2008), *Women in Politics: Evidence from the Indian States*, Department of Economics, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.
17. Freire P. (1970), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, New York, The Seabury Press,
18. Ghatak, M. (2000), *Grassroots Democracy: A Study of the Panchayat System in West Bengal* (Prepared for the Conference on Experiments in Empowered Deliberative Democracy, Wisconsin-Madison.
19. Goodman RM et al. (1998), *Identifying and defining the dimensions of community capacity to provide a basis for measurement*, Health Education & Behavior, 25(3) pp. 258–278.
20. Govt. of Assam (2003), *Women: Striving in an Unequal World* in Assam Human Development Report.
21. Goyder Hugh, (2001), *A personal perspective from international development*, Audit Commission Seminar on Performance Indicators for Community Involvement, London, December 4.
22. Hainard, F. and C. Verschuur. (2001), *Filling the Urban Policy Breach: Women's Empowerment, Grass-roots Organizations and Urban Governance*, International Political Science Review 22 (1) pp. 33-54.
23. Hape Holly M. (1994), *An experiment in empowerment of women in decision making*, Ranjana Kumari (ed.).
24. Hirst Paul, (1994), *Associative Democracy-New forms of Economic and Social Governance*, Cambridge, Polity Press, pp.49-51.
25. Institute of Socio-economic Development (1991): *Development: Tenets of women's learning, Orissa*.

26. Jayapalan, N. (2002), *Comprehensive Political Theory*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
27. Jejeebhoy, S. (2000), *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries*. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. Kabeer, N. (1999), *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*, Development and Change, Volume 30, Number 3, July, Blackwell Publishing.
29. Kabeer, N. (2001), "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," In *Discussing Women's Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, Ida Studies No. 3, Stockholm.
30. Karat, B. (2005): *Survival and Emancipation: Notes from Indian Women's Struggles*, Haryana.
31. Kate Young, (1998), *Gender and Development: A relational approach*, Oxford University Press.
32. Kishor, S. and K. Gupta (2004), "Women's Empowerment in India and Its States: Evidence from the NFHS", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIX, No.7.
33. Krishna A., (2003), 'Social Capital, Community Driven Development, and Empowerment: A short note on concepts and operations', World Bank working paper 33077, WB, Washington, DC.
34. Labonte R. (1994), *Health promotion and empowerment: reflections on professional practice*, *Health Education Quarterly*, 21(2) pp. 253-268.
35. Laverack G. (2004), *Health promotion practice: power and empowerment*, London, Sage.
36. Leiten, G.K. (1992), *Caste, Gender and Class in Panchayat*, EPW, July, 26.
37. Mahanta, A. (ed.) (2002), *Human Rights and Women of North East India*, Centre for Women's Studies, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh.
38. Malhotra, A. Schuler S.R. and Boender, Carol, (2002), *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*, Background Paper for World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives.

39. Malhotra, Anju and Mark Mather, (1997), *"Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka,"* Sociological Forum, 12(4) pp. 599-630.
40. Mayoux, L. (2000), *'Microfinance and the empowerment of women: A review of the key issues'*, Social Finance Unit Working Paper, 23. Geneva, ILO.
41. McNamara Kerry, (2003), *"Information and Communication Technologies, Poverty and Development: Learning from Experience"*, A Background Paper for the Information and Development Annual Symposium, Geneva, Switzerland.
42. Mondal, Sekh Rohim, (2005), *Rural Muslim women- Role and Status*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi.
43. Moser, Caroline O., (1993), *Gender Planning and Development: Theory Practice and Training*, available from Women, Ink.
44. Murthy, R.K., and Nitya Rao (1997), *Indian NGOs, Poverty Alleviation and their Capacity Enhancement in the 1990s: An Institutional and Social Relation Perspectives*, New Delhi.
45. Nararsimham S. (1999), *Women's role in Gram Sabha*, Kurukshetra, 48(1) Oct, pp. 35-38.
46. Narayan, D. (2002), *Empowerment and poverty reduction: a sourcebook* Washington, World Bank.
47. Narayan, D. (2007), *Empowerment: A Missing Dimension of HumanDevelopment*, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Conference, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford.
48. Narayan, D. (2002) (ed.), *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. Washington: World Bank.
49. Oakley Peter et. al, (1991), *Projects with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
50. Panday Divya, (1993), *'Empowerment of Women for environmentally sustainable development through Participatory action research*, Workshop on gender and rural environment IRMA, Anand, Gujarat.

51. Prasad, K. (2001), (ed.) *NGOs and Socio-Economic Development Opportunities*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
52. Putman R. (1995), *Bowling alone: America's declining social capital*, *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1) pp. 65–78.
53. Rao, D.N. (1999), '*Social Sector and Development Planning*', *Employment News*, Vol. XXIV, No.1.
54. Sadik, N. (1998), "*Women, the Center of Development*", *Development*, 1988, Vol. 1, 30-31.
55. Santillan, D., S. Schuler, H. Anh, T. Minh, Q. Trang and N. Duc., (2004), '*Developing Indicators to Assess Women's Empowerment in Vietnam*', *Development in Practice* 14(4).
56. Sen, A.K. (1990), *Gender and Co-operative Conflict*, in I. Tinker (ed.) *Persistent Inequalities*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
57. Sharma, K. (1992), '*Grassroots Organisation and women's empowerment*', *Samya Shakti*, Vol-6, New Delhi.
58. Shields, Lourene E. (1995), "*Women's Experiences of the Meaning of Empowerment*" *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol.5, No.1.
59. Subhas C. Arora, (202) '*Women Empowerment in India*', *Indian Journal of Politics*, Vol. XXXVI, (3-4) July-December, 2002, p. 124
60. Tillman Ellieson, (2003), *Problems of a Water Supply Project in India*, *Magazine for Development and Cooperation*, Bonn, Germany, Issue 05.
61. Turton Cathryn and Farrington John, (1998), *Enhancing Rural Livelihood through Participatory Watershed Development in India*, *Natural Resource Perspectives*, Overseas Development Institute, Volume 34.
62. Wallerstein N. (1992), *Powerlessness, empowerment, and health: implications for health promotion programs*, *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 6(3) pp. 197–205
63. Wilkinson Susan, (1990), '*Agents of empowerment and change: A case study of the Mahila Mandals in Bhargadh and Mingalpur villages, Utthanmahiti, Gujarat*.
64. World Bank, (2001), *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*, New York, Oxford University Press.

65. Hirschman, Albert, (1984), *Getting Ahead Collectively: Grassroots Experiences in Latin America*, New York, Pergamon Press.