

Chapter VII

Empowerment of Women

Human civilization has been undergoing steady and systematic changes over the years. Changes has become an inevitable aspect of modern living and any dynamic society must accept changes and generate the necessary potential to promote them further. Modern life has been complex faster, richer and varied in character.

India is a paradox in many ways. It is rich in natural resources, possesses a thriving industry and has a large pool of technical manpower but the large mass of its people are illiterate and poverty stricken and terms of human debt indices, it is among the worst-off nations. The goal is not an unrealistic one. Extrapolating from current growth rates, trends and suggestion various improvement and directions to boost debt show that India can soon be well on the way to providing our citizens with a decent standard of living. "India started well enough after independence, that is why we are able to produce enough food for our growing population through the green revolution although many international experts scoffed at the notion that India could ever be without a begging bowl"(Abdul Kalam-1998).¹⁵⁷

Our country suffers from the two greatest evils, the oppression of women and the exploitation of the poor. Real development would dawn on our country only with

¹⁵⁷ APJ. Abdul Kalam and Rajan, Y.S., *India2020-A vision for the new millennium*. Viking Penguin Books India (p) Ltd., New Delhi, 1998.

the emancipation of women and awakening of masses. Emancipation of women is nothing but giving power or authority to act independently. This freedom for women needs empowerment. To emancipate women, they must be empowered first. Empowerment of women must be an integral part of sustainable human development as women are the centre of attraction today. Emancipation of women is a process of economic and social activities that may alter the position, participation and performance of women.¹⁵⁸ So, to develop a nation an important prerequisite is the development of its women. Women are well developed only when they are empowered. To empower women is to provide some status to them. These are the educational status, economic status, financial status, social status, political status and occupational status etc. India has been among the less literate society among the world.¹⁵⁹ The opportunities for education were not open to all sections of the society even in British days. If the spirit of the age demands equality, the primary necessity is to provide education, which can only lead to economic well-being. Though women have suffered from the culture and nature of the Indian society with the economic and social inequalities, yet it is true that in the pre-independent and in the post-independent, Indian women enjoyed several rights and privileges. But most of them being illiterate and living in villages were hardly aware of the rights and privileges provided to them by the constitution.

¹⁵⁸ Zainab Rahman, "Women's Empowerment", In *Women and Society*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005, PP.122-133.

¹⁵⁹ Marilee Karl, "Participation in Politics", In *Women and empowerment: participation and decision making*, Zed Books, 1995, PP.59.

Modern economists give much importance on Human Resource Development. As far as economic growth and development are concerned, the contributions made by human beings are significant. In a highly progressive country like Japan, human capital is regarded as the real asset, particularly their women. To remove economic backwardness and instill the capacities and motivations to progress, it is necessary to increase the knowledge and skills of women. In fact, without an improvement in the quality of human factor, no progress is possible in the developed country.¹⁶⁰

It is an accepted fact that a woman plays a matchless role in the progress of a man and the family. She is the *Jeevan Shakti* of the family. The family, the society and even the country can draw valuable benefits from a woman. She assumes the role of the leading force and a balancing factor in the society. The fraternal fragrance, which emanates from a woman in country, is endowed with the propensity to make her dependents dynamic and economically prudent.

But it has been a long time that the status of women was different from that of men in terms of their roles and responsibilities both in family and the society. Most of their tasks and responsibilities had been undervalued. They are to spend their times and energy in unpaid domestic work which are not given much value. On the other hand, a male is considered as a guarantee of power, prestige authority and responsibility in the family and society. This discrimination against women

¹⁶⁰Hajira Kumar, "Women: Their Power and Powerlessness", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005. P.3.

adversely affects the distribution of economic and political powers throughout the world.

The constitution of India has explicitly conferred on women equal rights and opportunities i.e., the political, economic, social and educational equal to men. But because of superstitions, exploitation and oppressive traditions, a great majority of Indian women are not allowed to enjoy the facilities, rights and opportunities bestowed upon them. Now women are becoming more and more conscious of their constitutional as well as social rights. This consciousness has awakened in them a sense of urgency in experiencing equality and social justice. However, to feel equal rights and status government should seek appropriate ways and means to ensure that public and private enterprises share the responsibilities.

The preamble of Indian constitution ensures securing to all citizens of India equality of status and of opportunity as well as justice-social, economic and political. One of the directive principles of state policy prescribes that the state should direct its policy. Directive principles are fundamental in the governance of the country and are to be applied in enacting legislation, they are not judicially enforceable. After having laid down that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on ground of sex, among other things, it provides that nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children, so there is constitutional provision in India permitting the state to discriminate in favour of women, if such discrimination is found necessary. Women claim to be the largest

minority in India with a variety of social and economic disabilities, which prevent them from exercising their human rights and freedoms in society.¹⁶¹

The schemes launched by the government could not solve the problem of unemployment and the personnel entrusted with the job of implementation of the programmes were never keen to ameliorate schemes. Though the upliftment of poor is an arduous task, the government and bureaucracy lacked the strong determinations needed for sustained effects. All the schemes launched right from the community Development Programme down to the Food for work programme failed to improve the life-conditions of the agricultural labourers. The government has benefited only the privileged sections of the society. As consequence, the agricultural laboureres still remained poor and their dependence on labour power increased enormously in the recent years.¹⁶²

The lower status of women led to their oppression in two ways.

1. Oppression outside the family, and
2. Oppression within the family.

A large number of women in the rural areas, like their men folk, depend upon their daily wages earned in agriculture without holding any type of assets to their

¹⁶¹Hajira Kumar, "Women Empowerment and Government Support System in India", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, PP.250-272.

¹⁶² See K. Shanti, *Empowerment of Women*, Anmol Publications New Delhi, 1998.

credit.¹⁶³ Due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, they in the absence of skill resort to make wide shift both in the occupation and place of work. Though they work hard for long hours; they are paid bondage bearing the burden of indebtedness. Yet they continue to depend on the landowners for employment and loans. Thus, their dependence on agriculture makes the landlords utilize freely the services of all the members of the families of these labourers for increasing his assets.

The institution of patriarchy, strong culture factor related to the super-structure of the society, has survived the course of history and is being adopted with little change in its basic character by various social formations. The system of patriarchy, though co-exists with different modes of production the class structure and society as a whole, is somewhat autonomous. The sexual division of labour and the master-slave relationship between man and woman form the structure of the family life. The factors like the age-old household drudgery, bringing up children, cooking, washing and cleaning increased the burden of women in general and the female workers in particular. Addiction of men to alcohol, and beating wives further multiplied women's hardships. Hence the sphere of her oppression becomes total on her mental capacities, labour power, and her body and finally on her own self. With regards to women, the government has proposed organizing *Mahila Mandals* in the rural areas so that women could mobilize, and kept informed about their rights, if

¹⁶³ See Veena Majumdar and Indu Agnihotri, *Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement 1970s-1990s in EPW*, 1995.

possible. Exactly on the parallel lines there is also a general awakening the agricultural labourers to get them organized and united to solve their problems.

It was felt that without active participation of women no developmental program would be successful. The government functionaries, however, efficient and dedicated, can only act as catalytic agents and make women help themselves. Women had been paralyzed by denial of basic rights and subjected to social oppression. Both the central social Welfare Board and Department of Community development opined that the proper agency for uplifting them would be a committee of local women namely Mahila Mandal.

Thus, a major programme for the development of women in rural Indian was firstly conceived at the time of introduction of the Community Development Programme in 1952. It made a modest beginning when the rural women were encouraged to form women's club, which came to be known as *Mahila Mandal* in most of the states.

The concept of *Mahila Mandal* has originally emerged as a free formal association of urban middle class women. The government has tried this concept for a different purpose in the rural areas. Though it was felt that women should assemble regularly to learn from each other and also from the worker appointed by the government, the basic idea is to create opportunities for the rural women to improve their status. The main objectives of organizing the rural women of all castes and religious through the *Mahila Mandals* are:

- (1) Helping the women to participate in the developmental programmes;
- (2) Imparting social and political knowledge to women;
- (3) Establishing and running free maternity and child welfare centres;
- (4) Creating interest in women to work for the welfare of all people;
- (5) Developing leadership qualities among them; and
- (6) Promoting recreation like organizing holiday campus for women.

Perspectives of empowerment of women in India

Empowerment of women is gaining added significance in the Indian context owing to their greater participation in developmental activities. Women empowerment cannot be rigidly defined, particularly, in a situation like ours, where there exists a lot of difference among women in different sectors such as rural v/s urban women; women in organized sector v/s women in unorganized sector or informal sector; educated women v/s uneducated women, both in rural and urban sectors; and women belonging to lower level income group v/s those belonging to higher income group. Above all, one finds glaring differences between women belonging to upper caste, class and religious those belonging to lower classes. All these differences cited above is crucial factors to reckon with before anyone attempts to define the concept of empowerment of women and then analyzing the determinants of the same.

In other words, empowerment is influenced by a host of socio-economic, political and cultural factors. Socio-economic status would therefore be a ranking of an

individual by the society he/she lives in, in terms of his/her material belongings and cultural possessions along with the degree of respect, power and influence he/she wields.

Women in globalization

In the past, poor women's lives were nothing but the stories of pain, suffering humiliation and broken dreams. The recent and rapid change in women's role and responsibilities has shown that if women are properly guided towards productive and useful skills, they can be a formidable resource for national development. Any exploited society needs urgent correction. A woman is both valuable and almost inevitable. The nineties was the decade of the women. There is no avenue she had not trodden on, no obstacle she had not overcome and no job that was still taboo for her. Today's woman has secured every place, both literally and figuratively. The transformation in the social scene that has enabled women to rightly take their place pouring into the economy an immense flow of brain, power and energy, the changes can be felt by seeing the growing status of women. The level of economic equality and independence are the real indications to measure the status of women in advanced society. She alone knows how to save the erring from humiliation, how to educate disadvantaged children and many such things. Women are needed in all spheres of life and living. The declaration of the year 1975' as the international women's year' and 'the period 1976-85' as the 'International Decade of Women' and several national and international conferences reflect the concern shared globally

on the status of women. On November, 1, 1995, the world poverty day, it was estimated that women comprise almost 70% of the, more than 1.3 billion, poor in the world. So any economic upliftment policy that targets the poor has to specifically target women. The implication is that development should ultimately become a process of empowerment of women. The empowerment process encompasses severely mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by 'economic independence', which implies access to and control over production resources. Another component of empowerment is 'knowledge and awareness', the third is 'self-image' and the final is 'autonomy'. If we go through the world history then we will be able to notice that the first woman to climb Mount Everest is Mrs. Junko Tabei from Japan. 19 years old Gertrude Ederly was the first woman to swim the English Channel in 1926. An American lady Anne Bancroft was the first woman to reach North Pole of the World. Kalpana Chawla is the first Asian woman to go to space.¹⁶⁴

Women also did not neglect politics. Sirimavo Bandaranayake was the first woman Prime Minister in the world. Finland in Europe was the first country to elect women as members of Parliament. A Research Chemist in an industry became Prime Minister of England called Margaret Thatcher. Queen Victoria ruled Great Britain for a long period of 64 years. A remarkable woman, Princess Diana, captivated the hearts of people all over the world. The great woman Madam Curie won Nobel Prize twice.

¹⁶⁴ See Rajkumari Chandrasekhar, *what is the need for women?* Anmol Publications Pvt., New Delhi, 1998.

A humble woman Florence Nightingale organized the modern system of nursing. The first woman to receive a pilot's licence was Baroness de Laroche of France. Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman cosmonaut. The above statements vividly express the view that women are actively taking part in all economic, social, cultural and political events both directly and indirectly. They are part of the society who is active enough to be recognized by others as members of the society. Such an element cannot be neglected on any grounds. But still women are in the back pages and in most of the societies they are treated as an entity or as a sexual object. After identifying the position of women, it is realized that empowerment of women is important because the benefits will be felt not only by the women themselves but by their households as well. It may look like a more enlightened approach to ensure the empowerment of women but the returns to their families and even the societies as a whole will be worth it. But the question arises that why women as a group distinguished from the mass are including both men and women, it is mainly for the reason that women are systematically excluded from the full economic and political participation in the production and benefits of development. But the responsibilities for women to contribute to the household food security and also meet the other needs of the family are increasing without giving them greater access of resources to meet these needs. All the women may not be included under this consideration but only the women who are poor in resources and lack the ability to improve their standard of living. It is a fact that women need empowerment and

they may be benefited and become more productive if empowered. Women make up 50 percent of the world's population, comprise 33 percent of the official labour force, perform nearly 66.6 percent of all working hours, and receive 10 percent of the world's property. Woman has been developing within herself an image of self-sacrificing person devoid of any individuality with the role of a slave or servant obeying only the order of her master. But today, power and empowerment are concepts that are of considerable importance to people throughout the globe. The concept of human development has assumed the centre stage in a number of world summits and global conferences. Particularly the Vienna Conference urged the eradication of all forms discrimination against women.

A profile on women population and employment

Going by the census reports, it is found that the total population increased by 23.56% per unit at the All India level between 1981 and 1991. The female population increased by 26.5% at the National level during the above period. Rural population was around 74.26 at the National level respectively as per the census 2001 rural population at the National level. As regards rural female population, it was 36% at All India and 32.6% at the State Level and the same declined to 34% at the national level in 2001.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ See Census Reports (1981-2001).

Viewed in terms of workers, one finds some instructive changes as regards the composition of rural urban workers is concerned during the two decades between 1971 and 1991. It is found that rural population as a percentage of total increased from 35.50% to 40.24% between 1981 and 1991, at the National level.

Between male and female workers, there has been consistent increase in rural female workers, from 16% in 1971 to 23% in 1981 and to 27% in 1991, as against the increase in urban workers of 7%, 8% and 9.7% during the same periods. Another important aspect is that the population of female workers to male workers has also increased sizably. It was around 1:0.3 in 1971, but surged to 1:0.5 in 1991. However, female workers as a percentage of total female population have actually declined over the years.

Another dimension is the analysis of workers by the industrial categories. It is found that the workers get concentrated only in the category of cultivators (34%) agricultural labourers (45%) and in miscellaneous services to the tune of 7 to 8%

Table-1**Census Reports (1981-2001) All India**

Population	1981	1991	2001
Total(million)	683.33	844.32	1027.02
Male	349.93	437.81	531.28
Female	321.35	406.48	495.74
Decennial growth rate (1971-1981)	24.66	23.56	21.34
Sex ratio (female/1000male)	933.00	929.00	933.00
Rural	951.00	941.00	-
Urban	818.00	813.00	33.00
Rural Population	525.00	627.00	718.87
Male	269.00	323.00	370.76
Female	256.00	304.00	348.11
% age of total rural population	76.70	74.30	69.99

Source: census 1991 and 2001 (provisional figures)

Composition of male and female workers in India (% of total population)

		Persons (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1971	Total	34.17	52.75	14.22
	Rural	35.33	53.78	15.92
	Urban	29.61	48.88	7.18
1981	Total	36.60	52.62	19.67
	Rural	38.79	53.77	23.06
	Urban	29.99	49.66	8.31
1991	Total	37.68	51.56	22.73
	Rural	40.24	52.50	27.20
	Urban	30.44	48.95	9.74
2001	Total	38.66	26.68	11.98

Some steps for the empowerment of women

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive principles. The constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt steps in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year plan (1974-78) onwards a drastic

change has been marked of in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.¹⁶⁶

The National Commission for Women was set up by an act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for action (1995) and the outcome Document adopted by the UNGA session on Gender Equality and Development and peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶See Gita Sen and Srilatha Battiwala., *Empowering Women for Reproductive Right*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

¹⁶⁷ See India: *Alternative NGO Report on CEDAW. Initial Submission to the CEDAW Committee, NAWO*, January, 2000.

The policy also takes note of the commitments of the Ninth Year Plan and the other sectoral policies relating to empowerment of women. The Women's movements and a widespread network of non-government organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the status of women in India, "Towards Equality" and highlighted in the National perspective Plan for women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the platform for Action, Five Years after an assessment".

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country.¹⁶⁸

The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.

¹⁶⁸Sushma Sahay, "Why Empower Women?" In *women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, P.1.

Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector to education, health and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

Objectives

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

- 1) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- 2) The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom, by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
- 3) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- 4) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.

- 5) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- 6) Changing social attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- 7) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- 8) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- 9) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.¹⁶⁹

Judicial legal systems

Legal-judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault new laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offences. At the initiative of and with the full participation of all stakeholders including community and religious leaders, the policy would aim to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women.

¹⁶⁹Hajira Kumar, "Human Rights and other International Efforts for Women's Empowerment", In *Women's Empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies-A Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, PP.273-310.

The evolution of property rights in a patriarchal system has contributed to the subordinate status of women. The policy would aim to encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance by evolving consensus in order to make them gender just.

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, and also the advisory commissions, committee boards, trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies will be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the development process.¹⁷⁰

Policies, programmes and systems will be established to ensure mainstreaming of women's perspectives in all developmental process, as catalysts, participants and recipients. Wherever there are gaps in policies and programmes, women specific interventions would be undertaken to bridge these. Coordinating and monitoring mechanisms will also be devised to assess from time to time the progress of such

¹⁷⁰Sushma Sahay, "Organising Women for Empowerment", *In Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, 1998, PP.40-69.

mainstreaming mechanisms. Women's issues and concerns as a result will specially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, sectoral policies, plans and programs of action.

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

In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹Hajira Kumar, "Economic Empowerment of Women", In *Women's empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies- a Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, P.192.

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

- 1) Reinterpretation and redefinition of conventional concepts of work wherever necessary e.g., in the census records, to reflect women's contribution as producers and workers.
- 2) Preparation of satellite and national accounts.
- 3) Development of appropriate methodologies for undertaking (1) and (2) above.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of women and child development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment

especially in the informal economy and rural areas.¹⁷² Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.

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

The important role-played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing and agro industry and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They should be given comprehensive support in terms of labour legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors.

Women, at present, cannot work at night in factories even if they wish, suitable measures should be taken which would enable them to work on the night shift in factories.

¹⁷² M.K Rao, "Factors Influencing the Participation of Females", In *Empowerment of Women in India*, Discovery Publishing House, 2005, PP.41-88.

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

Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational systems, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be then a focus area. Sectoral targets in existing policies can be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes/other backward classes/minorities.¹⁷³ Gender sensitive curricula can develop at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services should be adopted and special attention should be given to the needs of

¹⁷³ Hajira Kumar, "Legal Support for Women Empowerment in India", In *Women's empowerment, Issues, Challenges & Strategies- a Source Book*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 2005, P.249.

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

To effectively meet problems of infant and maternal mortality and early marriages the availability of good and accurate data at micro level on deaths, birth and marriage is required. Strict implementation of registration of births and deaths should be ensured and registration of marriages would be made compulsory. In accordance with the commitment of the national population policy (2000) to population stabilization, this policy will recognize the critical need of men and women to have access to safe effective and affordable methods of family planning of their choice and the need to suitably address the issues of early marriages and spacing of children. Interventions such as spread of education, compulsory

registration of marriage and special programs should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that child marriages are eliminated especially in rural areas. Women's traditional knowledge about health care and nutrition will be recognized through proper documentation and its use should be encouraged. The use of Indian and alternative systems of medicine should be enhanced within the framework of overall health infrastructure available for women.¹⁷⁴

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

¹⁷⁴Sushma Sahay, "Frame work for Women's Empowerment", In *Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, Discovery Publishing House, 1998, PP.18-39.

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

Women's perspectives should be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both rural and urban areas. Special attention should be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single women, heads of households, working women, student's apprentices and trainees.¹⁷⁵

Women will be involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programs for environment, conservation and restoration. Considering the impact of environmental factors on their livelihoods, women's participation should be ensured in the conservation of the environment and control of environmental degradation. The vast majority of rural women still depends on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. In order to ensure the efficient use of these energy resources in an environmental friendly manner, the policy will aim at promoting the programs of non-conventional energy resources. Women will be involved in spreading the use of solar energy,

¹⁷⁵ See M.L. Andersen, *Thinking about Women: Sociological and feminist Perspectives*. 2nd ed., New York: Macmillan, 1988.

biogas, smokeless chaulahs and other rural application so as to have a visible impact of these measures in influencing ecosystem and in changing the life styles of rural women.

Programs should be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness should also be stepped up. Special measures should be taken for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery should be given a special focus too.

In recognition of the diversity of women's situations and in acknowledgement of the needs of especially disadvantaged groups, measures and programs should be undertaken to provide them with special assistance.¹⁷⁶ These groups include women in extreme poverty, destitute women, and women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc.

¹⁷⁶Srilatha Batliwala, *The Meaning of Women's Empowerment*, women's World, 1995, PP.23-34.