

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA –ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PRESENT MILLENNIUM.

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“Women are the pillars of the society”.

Abstract: Women are an important integral part of every human society, the progress of any society depends greatly upon women participation in all fields of life. Women is an economic asset not only to the family, but also to the country. Women’s economic contribution is always undervalued and are not treated as visible partners. Women are deprived in the process of economic upliftment and social reconstruction. The Government of India had ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as “**women’s Empowerment Year**” to focus on a vision where women are equal partners like men.

India is a country known for traditions, customs, blind beliefs and gender discrimination which is the major drawback for women empowerment. Every one of us must recognize and accept the fact that men and women are equal partners in life and understand the reality and try to bring change in the social system. Our understanding of empowerment reminds us that change in the physical, economic, political and social well being of women will not be sustained unless individuals change, relations change and social structures change.

According to many national and International Policy documents gender discrimination is one of the reasons behind deprivation. Today the concept of women empowerment has become the prime concern of every society. Now it is right time to look into existing policies and re think the developmental strategies for women in order to empower them in all spheres of social life. This study lays special emphasis on various concepts like the status of women in decision making powers, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, acceptance of unequal gender role, exposure to media, access to education, domestic violence, honor killing, Acid attacks and sexual harassment at work place and so on.

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the present socio- economic status of women in general, it also throws light on the various factors that affects women empowerment, and also the challenges to be faced by women in the present millennium. It also discuss about the government policies, programmes and social legislations which helps vulnerable women the so called weaker section of our society.

Keywords: empowerment, deprivation, social system, vulnerable, legislation.

“Life is challenge face it”

Introduction: The origin of the Indian idea of appropriate female behavior can be traced to the rules laid down by **Manu** in around 200 BC. India has witnessed gender inequality throughout the ages, women have been perceived as weak, not possessing the same abilities as their male counterparts, where some find it difficult to achieve economic independence. Consequently, women’s social and economic participation has been limited or restricted due to lack of opportunities to change the status quo. Being in those vulnerable circumstances, women are exploited. The social structure based on, and shaped by a number of factors such as caste system, class, race, gender, religious, social and cultural practices, mainstreams unjust power relations between men and women. Being born as a women in society comes with its advantages based on the afore-mentioned religious and socio-cultural context which may discriminate against many and deny them the right to social justice.

The need for women empowerment was felt in India long back, **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**, the religious, social and educational reformer and the maker of modern India, demanded inheritance of property rights for women, gave tremendous effort to abolish “sati system”, the Hindu funeral practice. **Iswarchandra vidya sagar** championed to uplift the status of women in India.

Jyothirao Phule, and his wife Savithri Bai Phule the great social reformer played important role in educating girl child. **Savithri Bai Phule** the first Indian women teacher opened school for untouchable girls in the year 1852, though she was harassed and beaten by stones from the community she did not stop her journey, which was boon for girls education.

Indian Former Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru** has said “when the women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves, and the Nation moves.”

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the **Millennium Development Goals**. The architect of Indian Constitution Dr.B.R. Ambedkar was of the opinion that unless and until women are empowered, nothing was going to bring about any change in their destiny. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directives Principles. It is our burden duty to respect women at every place and to encourage her to work together with dignity so that our nation can develop its economy as well as its moral.

All efforts of the reformists, activists, female welfare schemes of the government, and similar efforts of reformers and liberals for the women empowerment and abolition of gender inequality in India, have proven to

be inadequate in the present millennium.

Definition: In the words of **Crowther**, “Empowerment means to give somebody the power or authority to act.” Therefore women empowerment means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day to day lives, in the social, economic, and political term is – a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. The main motive behind women empowerment is to protect their rights, to enrich their quality of life and involve them in decision making process at all levels, particularly in those decisions which are related to their lives and families.

- Empowerment of women is aimed at striving towards acquisitions of the following :
- Higher literacy level and education.
- Better healthcare for her and her children.
- Equal ownership of productive resources.
- Increased participation in economic and commercial sector.
- Awareness of their rights.
- Better standard of living.
- Achieve self –reliance, self confidence, and self respect among women.

Methodology: The present paper is the theoretical paper based on primary and secondary data. The sources had been collected in different websites, articles, Journals, Government orders, Policy Documents, 2011 census reports, through Observations, News papers and Magzines along with the previous research studies. The study focus on the issues and challenges in empowering women in India. It throws light on social legislations policies and programmes which is base for women empowerment.

Need For the Study: Empowerment may be examined from two dimensions ie. Objective and Subjective dimensions. The objective dimension refers to the external sources of empowerment such as education, training, employment, economic independence, political privileges etc. the subjective dimensions refer to the internal experience of being empowered, that is expressed through the feelings of self confidence, self reliance, self respect, self assertion etc.

‘Welfare-Oriented approaches through legislations, government policies and programmes through NGOs and five year plans to ‘empowerment’ during the eight five year plan and more strongly by the declaration of 2001, as the ‘**Women’s Empowerment Year**’ by the Government of India justifies the study. The year was formally launched by the Prime Minister in a function held at **Vigyan Bhavan on 4th January, 2001**, they also awarded the first “**Stree Shakti Puraskars**” to five distinguished women from the grassroots who had made outstanding services for the social, educational and economic empowerment of women in remote and difficult areas.

The purpose of declaring the year 2001 as the Women Empowerment Year was as follows:

- To create and raise large scale awareness of women’s

issues with active participation and involvement of all women and men.

- To initiate and accelerate action to improve access and control of resources by women.
- To create an enabling environment to enhance self-confidence and autonomy of women.

Empowering women is a challenge, effective political response, effective gender equality policies, programs, and development initiatives targeting women upliftment, raising awareness, combating stereotypes, creating a good work, life balance, promoting social inclusion of women, preventing and combating gender-based violence, promoting legal reforms and ensuring gender justice, improving women’s health status, expanding opportunities and choices in life of women by providing technical and skilled education, mainstreaming the constitutional legislations, into policies and programmes and linkage with gender are some of the areas which facilitate attaining the goals of women empowerment.

‘**Empowerment**’ is about helping everyone to be their best.

Factors Affecting Women Empowerment:

Violence on women (at home and society): Women in the Indian Society have been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation for as long as we have written records of social organization and family life. Today, women are being gradually recognized as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the life of men; but till a few decades back, their condition was pitiable. Ideologies, institutional practices and the existing norms in the society have contributed much to their harassment. Some of these behavioral practices thrive even today. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favour of women in our society after independence, countless women still continue to be victims of violence. Women are **beaten, dowry death, wife battering, murdered, acid attacks, honour- killing, kidnapped, burnt and raped.**

The **United Nations Declaration** on the elimination of violence against women general assembly resolution **December 1993**, protects the women from violence and harassment to some extent. **United Nations resolution** designated **November 25th** as **International Day for the elimination of violence against women.**

As **United Nations Conference (Vienna 1993)** envisaged that all women rights are human rights and affirmed that any form of violence against women is violation of human rights. Still women should take it as challenge without losing the hopes. She should learn to be assertive and accept new roles for themselves. One should develop an optimistic and hopeful approach to life.

Sexual Harassment on women at work place: Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental right of equality to all citizens and prohibits any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, gender and race yet in some terms, there is discrimination to women in almost all fields. Every

day majority of women are physically, mentally, psychologically abused, tortured and harassed inside the home as well as in the society. As per the **National Crime Bureau Statistics in 2012** a crime has been recorded against women in every minute in India. Every **60 minutes** two women are raped in our country. Every **six hours**, a young married woman is found beaten to death, burnt or driven to suicide. For ex; As per **NCBS report 2012** there are **24206**, cases of Rape has been registered, in **Delhi** alone **605 rape cases** had been registered. Apart from the Delhi Gang rape on **Nirbhaya**, as well as rape incidents that we read in the News Paper and media every day the victims are **4 years** child to **65 years** aged women. A tourist couple who visited India from Swiss had been raped by 8 youths of **Madhya Pradesh** in front of her husband that to in the month of March 16th, 2013 which month is known for the celebration of International Women's Day.

Women who are working in foreign countries are not safe, as we all are aware of burning issue of **smt Devayani khobragade** then the **Deputy Consul General of the consulate general of India in New York**, on December 11, 2013, was charged by U.S authorities with committing visa fraud and providing false statements in order to gain entry to the united states for Sangeeta Richard a women of Indian Nationality for employment as a domestic worker for khobragade in New York. Khobragade had been arrested by U.S. Federal Law Enforcement authorities and was then subjected to a search of her body cavities commonly called a "strip search" who had been harassed, ill-treated and sent back to our country on January 9th 2014 by the American Government by violating the Vienna convention on consular relations where by diplomats enjoy immunity. In such circumstances how one can think of women empowerment. Many women hesitates to come out of home instead they wanted to safeguard their family and be secured being inside the home who's potentialities is becoming mere waste.

In **2002** the International criminal tribunal in the Hague condemned this violence as a crib against humanity. Women from her cradle to her grave faces lot of in justice and almost all times her greatest misfortune seeks to be that she is unaware of her rights. Women in Indian society have been victims of ill-treatment, humiliation, torture, and exploitation, for as long as the history of social organizations and family life are available.

Gender Discrimination: According to **Bina Agarwal (2000)** gender ideology, as embedded in social perceptions and social norms is one of the critical neglected dimensions of gender inequality. These ideological factors affect economic outcomes for women in virtually every sphere, including property rights, employment or intra-household allocation.

The women on account of gender-based practices cannot address the development issues and peace

initiatives as they lack access to decision making bodies and power structures which control the society and determine peace initiatives. As a result of this the resistance against women empowerment has not died down. It there by caused waste of human resources and uneconomic use of women talent. It was felt that a void exists between legislation and implementation. Because of the socio- economic inequality, law doesnot benefit allwomen alike, their inability is compounded by their lack of legal awareness, preventing them for their press for their rights. It was realized that there is a great need to repeal the laws that discriminate against women in the matters of nationality, inheritance, ownership and control of resources, freedom of movement.

Lack of social security: In the closing years of the 20th century, social security systems have been under challenge, some consider that the systems are too expensive and that they harm the process of economic growth and development. Today women are working both in the organized sector as well as unorganized sector, majority of the companies and factories are not providing social security to women.

According to **Article 22 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which states every one as a member of society has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort, International co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his/her dignity and the free developments of his/ her personality.

Poor Economic and Political Participation: Females constitute about 50 percent of country's human resource. India ranked 105th position in the Global Gender Gap Index of 135 countries for 2012, from 113th position in the previous year, according to the world Economic forum. This index, examines the gap between men and women on the basis of economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, and political empowerment.

O.P.Bohra (1997) states that **73rd and 74th** amendment (**1993**)act mainly aimed at decentralizing the power and also removing the gender imbalance and bias in the institutions of local self government. He justifies the rationale to provide reservations for following reasons. What is actual intention of our policy makers, 73rd constitution amendment need to recognize and strengthen women's constructive decision making and managerial rule.

Illiteracy and Ignorance: Due to lack of education and rural background women are not aware of their rights. As a result women are becoming the victims of atrocities. As per **2011 census** female literacy rate is **65.46** in **India** compare to male literacy rate is **82.14**. Due to illiteracy and ignorance constitutional rights are not reaching the women.

Health Issues: Women today are facing a lot of health problems. Modern complex varieties work are causing mental, physical, emotional and psychological problems

to women. In fact, the status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand, she is at the peak of the ladder of success; on the other hand, she silently suffers the violence inflicted on her by her own family members. Time management between her professional work and domestic work is not that easy. Due to stress and strain she suffers from many diseases like migraines, gastric, abortions, blood pressure, malnutrition, cervical and breast cancers, sexually transmitted diseases, diabetic, back pain and menstrual problems etc.

Lack of skilled and Technical Education: In the present scenario traditional degrees will not sustain, instead to compete in this competitive world there is a need for skilled and technical education, which is not reaching the rural people.

Socio-Cultural Factors: Patriarchal system prevails in most areas, which gives preference to boy's education. still female infanticide is in practice, majority of the parents they pray for male baby with the belief that without a son their life is incomplete. Women are not allowed to go out and work in the orthodox families. Widows are ill-treated. In the rural areas women folk in general remained at periphery though rural women constitute more three fourth of female population (Jain:1983). Numerous references towards the consistent denial of access to decision-making bodies, gender bias, in various spheres, male dominance, and confining women to mere household work.

Strategies for Women Empowerment:

The World Conference of the International women's Year held at Mexico, in the year 1975;

The conference adopted a Declaration popularly called Declaration of Mexico on Equality of Women and their contribution to development. It resolved, to implement the objectives of the International Women's Year and the "world Plan of Action" was adopted to adopt the regional plan of action to adopt 35 resolutions in which it was decided to recommend the observance of united "United Nations decade for women" and to convene the second world conference in 1980. The declarations incorporated principles that are contributory towards the cause of women empowerment at global level with emphasis on equality of men and women, equal rights and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society access to women education and training.

The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights and The International Covenants on Human Rights , and other instruments and the progress made in the matter of equality of rights.

This declaration got necessitated for the attainment of equality of rights between men and women and the elimination of sex based discrimination. As such it consolidated the number of principles incorporated in various earlier instruments while restating new principles, which did not exist in the earlier conventions and recommendations. They are,

(a).Denial or limiting the equality rights of women is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity.

(b).Abolition of existing laws, customs, regulations, and practices which are discriminatory against women, and need for adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women.

(c).Need for ratification or adoption of the international instruments of the United Nations and specialized agencies relating to the elimination of discrimination against women and their full implementation.

(d). Need to generate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices derogatory to womanhood,

(e).Need to ensure right to vote to women on equal terms with men and their eligibility for election to all publicly elected bodies and right to hold public office and exercise all public functions.

(f).Marriage to an alien shall not automatically affect the nationality of wife and the women shall have same rights as men to acquire, change or retain nationality.

(g).In the field of civil law equal rights shall be ensured to women married or unmarried with the help of appropriate legislation.

(h).Penal provision enumerated in the penal code, which are discriminatory against women, should be repealed. Equality of rights in education at all levels to girls and women married or unmarried be ensured through appropriate measures.

(i). Appropriate measure to be taken to ensure equality of rights to women in the field of economic and social life.

National Commission For Women 1990: The National Commission for women is certainly an institution that can monitor the effective functioning of the institutions charged with the dispensation of justice to women. Apart from this the commission can also monitor the effective enforcement of legislation aiming at ensuring equality among women in all areas of social, political and economic promotion and development. The commission was set up in the year 1992, after legislative enactment in 1990 as a national apex statutory body to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redressal of grievances and advise government on all policy matters affecting women.

From the year 1990-2000 is known as 'Decade of the girl child'. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) also declares the year 1990 as the Year of the girl child. It also included Technical Committee on Women and Child Development to empower women.

The function of the Commission are of judicial and executive character since the Commission has the power to take up the cases of violation of the provisions of the constitution and of other laws relating to women with the appropriate authorities. The Commission can look into complaints relating to deprivation of women's rights; non- implementation of laws enacted to provide protection to women and also to achieve objectives of equality and development.

The commission can call for special investigations into specific problems or situations arising out of discrimination and atrocities against women and identify the constraints so as to recommend strategies for their removal.

National Policy For Empowerment Of women 2001: National Policy For Empowerment Of women 2001 has as its goal bringing about advancement, development and empowerment of women in all spheres of life through creation of more responsive judicial and legal system sensitive to women and mainstreaming a gender perspective in the developmental process. The strengthening and formation of relevant institutional mechanisms and implementation of international obligations, commitments and cooperation at the international, regional and sub-regional level was another commitment.

The objectives of this policy includes:

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 of social life.
3. Equal access participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
4. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
6. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Constitutional rights: In free India number of legislations have been enacted and amended to ensure equality of status and empower women socially, economically, culturally, and politically are as follows;

1. The sexual harassment of Women at Work place (prevention, prohibition and re dressal) Act 2013 .

The act will ensure that women are protected against sexual harassment at all work places in public or private, this will contribute to realization of their gender equality, life and liberty and equality in working conditions everywhere. The sense of security at the work place will improve women's participation in work, resulting in their economic empowerment and inclusive growth.

2. Suppression of immoral traffic women and girls

Act 1956 (Act No. 104 of 1956, dt. 30.12.1956):

An Act to provide in pursuance of the international convention signed at New York on the 9th day of May, 1950, for the prevention of immoral traffic.

3. Dowry prohibition Act 1961 (Act No. 28 of 1961, dt. 20.5.1961): In this Act, dowry means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly before marriage or after marriage by force or demand is punishable and considered as crime.

4. Domestic violence Act, 2005 (Act No. 43 of 2005), An Act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental there to. Dignity of women and their equal participation in economic, social and cultural development in contemporary world scenario- For centuries past, women all over the world have not only been denied full justice, social, economic and political, but as a "weaker sex" they have been used, abused, exploited and, then discarded, to lead immoral, street vagrant and destitute life till their death. The Indian regard women social evil to be burnt at pyre of her husband. Nowadays, however women have broken their ill-social shackles and are ready to face the contemporary challenges without any help and hesitation and, consequently, **March 8**, is formally observed and celebrated in several countries, including India, as a mark of integrated achievements towards the equality of rights, status and dignity of women and their equal participation in economic, social and cultural development in contemporary world scenario.

5. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Act No. 53 of 1961, dt. 12th December, 1961): An Act to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period and after child-birth and to provide for maternity benefit and certain other benefits.

6. Medical Termination of Pregnancy rules, 2003 (GSR No. 485(E), dated 13-6-2003): The above act legalizes abortion by qualified professional on humanitarian or medical grounds.

7. Indecent Representation of women (prohibition) Act, 1986 (Act No. 60 of 1986, Dated 23-12-1986): An Act to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner and for matters connected therewith or incidental there to.

8. Commission of Sati (prevention) Act, 1987 (Act No. 3.1.1988): An Act to provide for the more effective prevention of the commission of Sati and its glorification and for matters connected herewith or incidental there to.

Whereas sati or burning or burying alive of widows or women is revolting to the feelings of human nature and is nowhere by any of the religions of India as an imperative duty. It is necessary to take more effective measures to prevent the commission of sati and its

glorification.

Until and unless it changes the mind set of people these legislations cannot bring any changes among the men folk. **Article 14 to 21** of the Indian Constitution declaration contain the civil and political rights which all human beings are entitled to these include right to life, liberty, security, freedom from slavery and servitude, right to equality before law etc. In spite of these amendments and legislations we find violence and harassment on women in all spheres of social world.

9.Hindu Succession Act,1956.(Act No.30 of 1956,dt.17.6.1956): As per this Act women have equal rights to succeed her ancestors property.

10.Equal Remuneration Act,1976 (Act No.25th of 1976,dt.11th February, 1976): An Act to provide for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers and for the prevention of discrimination, on the ground of sex, against women in the matter of employment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Women empowerment through Self Help Groups:

Self Help Groups (SHGs) not only unite the women folk but also plays major role in empowering them. The SHGs are mostly informal groups whose members pool savings and relend within the groups on rational or need basis. These groups have been used to achieve economic security for its members as its main activity is income generating, apart from the social and political activities. SHG members are socially and economically secured to some extent as the group members consist 12-20 and they are having the homogeneity feeling that they belong to single family they co-operate with each other and they also gives moral support to each other. However Government is also giving Rs 5000 as revolving funds to each SHGs, and based on their savings and seniority banks are also providing loans to them. Through SGSY scheme through subsidies government is providing loans to these groups. No doubt SHGs are the agents of women empowerment.

Women empowerment through Five year plans:

Women under five years plans development has been receiving attention of the government right from the first plan (1951-1956).but, the same has been treated with the welfare of the disadvantage groups like destitute, disable, aged, etc. the central social welfare board (CSWB), setup in 1953, acts as an Apex body at national level to promote voluntary action at various levels, especially at the grass root, to take up welfare-related activities for women and children. The Second to Fifth Plans (1956-79) continued to reflect the very same welfare approach, besides giving priority to women's education, and launching measures to improve maternal and child health service, supplementary feeding for children and expectant and nursing mothers.

The shift in the approach from welfare to development of women could take place only in the sixth plan (1980-85). Accordingly, the Sixth Plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a special thrust on the

three core sectors of health, education and employment. In the Seventh plan (1980-90), the developmental programmes continued with the major objective of raising their economic and social status and bringing them into the mainstream of nation development. A significant step in this direction was to identify/promote the '**Beneficiary-Oriented Schemes**' (BOS) in various developmental sectors which extended direct benefits to women.

The thrust on generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper education and vocational training continued. The Eight Plan (1992-97), with human development as its major focus, played a very important role in the development of women. It promised to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors do not by-pass women, implement special programmes to complement the general development programmes and to monitor the flow of benefits to women from other development sectors and enable women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) made two significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women. Firstly, 'Empowerment of Women' became one of the nine primary objectives of the North Plan. To this effect, the Approach of the Plan was to create an enabling environment where women could freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men. Secondly, the plan attempted 'convergence of exiting services available in both women-specific and women related sectors. To this effect, it directed both the centre and the states to adopt a special strategy of '**women's Component Plan**' through which not less than 30% of funds flow to women from all the general development sectors.

The Tenth Five year plan (2002-2007) called for the three pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and providing gender justice to create an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and thus advance gender equality goal.

Gender Equality: The link between gender equality and poverty, growth and productivity education, health and nutrition and environment were the key issues identified by the development community and were included as development goals. These goals were adopted as Millenium Development Goals (MDGS), a year after the millennium Declaration signed in September 2000 a United Nations Millenium Summit. The MDGS commitment is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development which is truly sustainable. Gender Equality is not only a goal in its own right but an essential ingredient for achieving the development goals of a society and women empowerment.

Gender Sensitization: Women from her cradle to her

grave faces lot of injustice and almost all times her greatest misfortune seeks to be that she is un aware of her rights. The study of gender inequality is essential to understand how gender differences pattern our identities, attitudes, roles, relationships and resources more deeply and persistently than class, race or other social constructs. In all societies including our own, sex and gender are so tightly linked that we have great difficulty in disassociating them.

Indian constitution amended number of legislation to ensure equality of status and opportunity for women, because of illiteracy, poverty, stronghold of religion, patriarchal norms, gender inequality still appears to be a mirage. Legislative sanctions by themselves, as all of us know, cannot raise the status of women. It demands a change of heart, a change in the value system on the part of men folk and also an awareness of rights and opportunities among women.

Apart from these, various welfare measure have been initiated by the government from time to time empowering women. Many schemes had been introduced to encourage and support women through training and employment programmes for women, Mahila Samridhi yojana, women and child development dept, Bhagya Shree Child Welfare Bhima Yojana, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Mahathma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme etc.

Conclusion: Women empowerment is not against men but against the system of patriarchy and all its manifestations. Gender equality means equal access to resources and opportunities, a value system based on equality, equal participation in decision making, equal control over resources and benefits for both men and women. It is found that as a result of all the efforts made at various levels, government as well as NGOs, the situation of women on the whole has improved with regard to some of the important indicators of women's

empowerment such as literacy, education, employment, health, human rights etc. On the basis of ultimate analysis of the various studies, reports, empirical researches, it becomes clear that what comes in the way of women's empowerment are mainly some of the interdependent factors—like lack of human values including social and family values of mutual respect, gender bias and non-egalitarian value, attitude and psyche of men, women and society towards the girl child; prevalence of inhuman values of violence including sexual violence and cruelty, traditions, customs, practices, rituals, beliefs and ideologies that oppress and suppress women in the Indian society. For developing a positive attitude towards women's empowerment, the need of the hour is a revolution in thinking and the change of heart, mindset, attitude and the behavior of men towards women.

Women in India always occupy a secondary position in comparison to men, which is ensured by the gendered hierarchy created and sustained by a rigid patriarchal structure which is still continuing in the present millennium. In such a scenario, women should come forward to face the challenges and empower herself in the present competitive world.

Women Empowerment not only point towards their material development, but is oriented towards mere economic growth which generally plays an important role in the overall developmental strategy as has been conceived of in the case of other underprivileged classes. Women empowerment should be constructed as the overall development of their faculty of self-realization, self-image and identity and the economic development, which holds the key to their real development. The empowerment must underline the formation of a mature, critical and conscious approach towards one's own self and the world around.

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