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## Abstract

Gone are the days when women had enjoyed equality of power and rights in the society. The persistence of the patriarchy with a sacrosanct support by the Scriptures had firmly contained within its hold the entire sphere of familial and social life in India and had in turn confined woman's life to the family and that fate had continued for long during the static slumber of the Asiatic society. It was the big bang of the greedy European colonialism and its repercussions in the form of hot blooded nationalist feelings that gradually weakened the patriarchal chains on womanhood. Even though the principle of gender equality is firmly established in the Indian Constitution, translating *de jure* gender equality and the promise of social, economic and political justice, into *de facto* reality has been one of India's major challenges over the years. There is still unfortunately a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation and policies and the current status of Indian women. Though for the first time, a separate section on 'Gender Equity' was included in the Draft Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan, the paper has not given enough focus on women's empowerment issues in the country. The present paper critically examines the Indian experience over time of women's development.

*“Yatra nāryastu pūjyante  
Ramante tatra dhevata:  
Yatraitastu na pūjyante  
Sarvāstratrā phalā: kriya:”*

(“Where women are worshipped,  
Gods are pleased there;  
Where they are not worshipped,  
All functions go in vain.”)

– *Manusmṛti* 3: 56.

*“Pitā Rakshati Kaumere,  
bharttā rakshati Yavwane,  
rakshati sthāvere putrā,  
na stri swātantryamarhatī”*

(“Her father protects her in childhood;  
her husband protects her in youth;  
and her son protects her in old age;  
a woman is never fit for independence.”)

– *Manusmṛti* 9: 3.

*“Vinā nārim nishphalā lōkayātrā!”*  
(“Without woman, the world journey is fruitless.”)

*“Arddham bhāryā manushyasya;  
Bhāryā shreshthamā sakhā:!”*  
(“Wife forms half of man;  
Wife is his greatest comrade.”)

“To call women the weaker sex is libel;  
it is man’s injustice to women”

“The wife is not the husband’s bond-slave  
but his companion and his help-mate  
and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows....  
as free as the husband to choose her own path.”

– *Mahatma Gandhi*

“Gender bias is deeply ingrained in our social psyche and this is reflected in indicators such as sex ratios, literacy and health gaps of boys and girls, Maternal Mortality Rates etc. These data, however, do not fully reflect the discrimination against women. The 11<sup>th</sup> Plan strategy for gender equity must pay attention to all aspects of women’s lives. It must ensure that women live and live with dignity. It must examine everything from generic problems like freedom from patriarchy to specific issues such as clean cooking fuels, care for pregnant and nursing women, dignified spaces for violated women, toilets for women and girls, crèches at work places etc.” (Government of India 2006a)

# Women's Development: The Indian Experience

BP Asalatha

## 1. Introduction

It is now generally accepted that the prehistoric society had been matriarchal, the system by which the family is built up and grouped around the mother, conferring special rights on women (Hartley 1914). That women had enjoyed equal rights as men had found its reflections in some of the later literary works; for example, in the *Mahābhārata*, there is a reported conversation between *Śiva* and *Śakti (Uma)*, wherein *Śiva* says: “..... thy power and energy are equal to my own ....” (quoted in Coomaraswamy 1918 [2003: 81]). It is significant to note that in the Indian culture the only words for strength and power are feminine: ‘*Śakti*’, identified with ‘mother’, means power and strength; this also explains the widespread practice of worshipping *Śakti* or ‘*Amman*’ (அம்மன் in Tamil, meaning mother) in several parts of India. However, the matriarchate had soon been replaced by the patriarchate with a sacrosanct support by the Scriptures; thus in the Indian context, the *Manusmṛti* in one breath honours woman and in the next breath condemns her to eternal dependence on man.<sup>1</sup> This double standard of morality that had firmly contained within its hold the entire sphere of familial and social life in India had in turn confined woman’s life to the family and that fate had continued for long during the static slumber of the Asiatic society. It was the big bang of the greedy European colonialism and its repercussions in the form of hot blooded nationalist feelings that gradually weakened the patriarchal chains on womanhood.

One of the fallouts of English education for the middle class during the colonial period was a change in attitude towards women. Through the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, the Bengali middle class questioned the rigidity of brahminical Hinduism. Social reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy opposed Sati or the practice of burning the widow on the husband's funeral pyre. The government abolished it in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Several decades of agitation led to the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 that stipulated 14 as the minimum age of marriage for a girl. Girls’ education through formal schooling was another major concern. An all India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927. It gave the stimulus to start a leading organization in the movement for social changes.

Women played a major role in the struggle for freedom from colonial rule. In 1917, the

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to find that the *Manusmṛti* also has rooms for an interpretation that seeks for oneness of man and woman and not just equality with each other (*Manusmṛti* 4: 1 & 4).

first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights. The Indian National Congress supported the demand. In 1949 independent India gave them their due by enshrining in the Constitution the right of equality for women. Thus the principle of gender equality is firmly established in the Indian Constitution. However, translating *de jure* gender equality and the promise of social, economic and political justice, into *de facto* reality has been one of India's major challenges over the years. There is still unfortunately a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation and policies and the current status of Indian women. Though for the first time, a separate section on 'Gender Equity' was included in the Draft Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan, the paper has not given enough focus on women's empowerment issues in the country. The present paper critically examines the Indian experience over time of women in development.

## **2. Overview of Women's Status**

### **Demography**

The 2011 census counted 586.5 million females constituting less than half (48.46%) of the total population of India (1,210.19 million). The female population grew at 21.8% during the decade 1991-2001 against a decadal growth rate of 21.4% of the total population and at 18.12 % in 2001-2011 against 17.64%. About 73% (360.9 million) of the female population live in rural areas. The current demographic structure shows a predominantly young female population, with as much as 57.1% being in the age group of 15-60 years.

The sex-ratio which was 972 females per 1000 males in 1901 declined to 946 in 1951 and further to 927 in 1991 and marginally increased to 933 in 2001 and to 940 in 2011. There is however considerable regional and inter-state variation in the sex ratio. There was a fall in the sex ratio from 965 in 1951 to 946 in 2001 in rural India, whereas it increased from 860 in 1951 to 900 in 2001 in urban India. It favours females only in Kerala (1084 against 1058 in 2001, down from 1068 in 1991); two States that had favourable sex ratio in 1991 (Himachal Pradesh: 1070 and Goa: 1019) have now come down miserably (Himachal Pradesh: 974 up from 968 of 2001 and Goa: 968 up from 961 in 2001). Sex ratio in Tamil Nadu was exactly even (1000) in 1991, but in 2001 it was 987 and in 2011, 995, though much higher than the all-India sex ratio of 940. At the lowest end is Delhi (866 up from 821 of 2001, still down from 824 in 1991), followed by Haryana (877 against 861 of 2001 and 888 in 1991). The adverse sex ratio and its decline in all age groups right from childhood through child bearing ages, has become a matter of grave concern in India. While preference for sons, intra household gender discrimination and denial and limited access to health care may explain this tragic situation, the bridging of gender gaps in infant mortality rates, the increase in life expectation at birth (which is now higher for women than for men) are sure factors that should have naturally led to a reversal of the trend. It should be noted that India has already framed legislation banning the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for sex determination.

The expectancy of life at birth has improved considerably and mortality for almost all ages has declined sharply. Life expectancy of females which was 23.96 years at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is now 64.2 (during 2002-06) 66.1 years – higher than that of males at 62.6 years (Government of India 2011: x). It is worth noting that the decades-long gender gap in improving life expectancy has finally been corrected.

India has one of the largest primary health care system in the world; and she runs the world's largest Integrated Child Development Programme (ICDS). This and other interventions including household food security have resulted in a sharp decline in the infant mortality rate (IMR): that for females has fallen from 131 in 1978 to 61 in 2005 and for males from 123 to 56 during the same reference period. The maternal mortality rate too fell from 407 in 1998 to 301 in 2001-03.

One of the major problems facing India is its large population and persistent high rates of growth. The population has been growing at around 2% or more per annum since 1961. It is true the age specific fertility rates have declined for women in all age groups since 1981, but not uniformly. The decline has been small for the peak fertility years 20-29. It should also be noted that in India more than 90% of women are married at the age of 25-29 years. About 30% females are married off while still in their teens (15-19 years). However, the mean age at effective marriage for females has risen from 18.3 in 1981 to 20.2 years in 2005. Also note that the Child Marriage Restraint Act has raised the minimum age of marriage of girls to 18 years and boys to 21 years.

Although female literacy has gone up six times since 1951, it still represents an area of major concern; it now stands at 65.46%, (against 53.7% in 2001) only as opposed to the male literacy rate of 82.14% (75.3% in 2001). Within the country, there exist wide variations; while Kerala has near universal literacy and Tamil Nadu has a female literacy of 73.86% (64.43% in 2001), female literacy in Bihar is only 53.33% (33.12% in 2001).

Similarly, although girl's enrolment in school has increased greatly and consistently at all levels, the rising rates of drop-outs continues to be the major problem. Thus, while gross enrolment ratio for girls at the primary level is about 96% (vis-à-vis over 100% for boys) as in 2003-04, about 29% of the number of girls enrolling at the primary age drop out before completing primary level, and about 53% drop out before completing upper primary levels. Ultimately, only about 33% of girls entering the primary stage complete schooling.

Women are mostly found in marginal and casual employment and that also mostly in agriculture and the growing informal sector. According to 2001 Census data, the work participation rate (proportion of employed or total workers to population in economically active age group) of females declined up to 1971 and then rose steadily from 14.22% in 1971 to 22.27% in 1991 and further to 25.7%. Of the total 25.7% female work participation, main workers contributed 14.7% and marginal workers 11%. Women constitute about 61% of the total marginal workers of the country. Women's employment in the organized sector, though only nearly 1/4<sup>th</sup> that of men, is now (2004) around 18.7% of the total employment. Nearly 60% of such organized sector employment of women is in the public sector.

## Entitlements

### (i) Constitutional Provisions

A number of Articles of the Constitution specially reiterated the commitment of the constitution towards the socio economic development of women and upholding their political right and participation in decision making (see Box 1). The Constitution provides for equality before law and equal protection of the law, prohibition of discrimination, and equality of opportunity in matter of public employment. It further provides for affirmative action and for positive discrimination by empowering the State to make special provisions for women. The Constitution also contains certain provisions, called Directive Principles, which enjoin upon the State *inter alia* to secure the right to adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally, equal pay for equal work for both men and women, the health and strength of workers, for both men and women, and ensuring that the citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age and strength. Further a duty is cast on every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women

#### Box 1:

#### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

The Constitution of India guarantees

- The right to equality (Article 14, 16)
- Right to equality and equal protection before the law (Article 15)
- Provides for discrimination in favour of women [Article 15 (3)]
- Right to life (Article 21)
- To secure all citizens men and women equally the right to means of livelihood [Article 39(a)]
- To make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42)
- To renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51(A) (e)].

While the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution are justiciable, the Directive Principles of the Policy are considered in general non-justiciable in terms of recourse to judicial remedies. The Supreme Court of India however through its activist role has infused dynamism even into the non-justiciable provisions and has issued directives to

the State from time to time to implement the Directive Principles. In a recent judgement the Supreme Court made it clear that the State or any of its organs could not do anything that violates these principles and some of the principles have already become law. The Maternity Benefits Act and the reservations for women in institutions of local governance are two relevant examples. Further, according to the Supreme Court, some directive Principles like the one on compulsory education, with the lapse of time provided by the Constitution have now to be viewed as a fundamental right. Recent pronouncements of the Supreme Court on such matters as the need for a Uniform Civil Code for all women irrespective of religion, the need for equal property rights for women particularly in case of inheritance, pronouncements on child labour, child prostitution, sexual harassment at place of work, need for in-camera trial of rape cases etc. are evidence of such an activist role of the Court. The Supreme Court has also in a number of personal judgements struck down some unequal provisions of certain personal laws by declaring them as ultra vires to the Constitution of India (For example 14 laws governing Christians in Kerala were struck down).

**(ii) Legislations and laws for women**

The State enacted several women-specific and women-related legislations to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of Sati etc. The recently notified Prevention of Domestic Violence Act is a landmark law in acting as a deterrent as well as providing legal recourse to the women who are victims of any form of domestic violence. Apart from these, there are a number of laws which may not be gender specific but still have ramifications on women (see Boxes 2, 3, 4, and 5).

**Box 2:**

**LEGAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

**Laws related to dowry, marriage and divorce**

- Converts' Marriage Dissolution Act, 1866
- Indian Divorce Act, 1869
- Christian Marriage Act, 1872
- Special Marriage Act, 1954
- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Foreign Marriage Act, 1969
- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

## **The actual Experience**

The Government of India became a signatory to the Beijing Declaration 1995 that put women's issues in the forefront and endorsed its 2001 Platform for Action. The World Summit for Social Development at Copenhagen, also in 1995, the Beijing Plus 5 conference at the United Nations in 2000 in Cairo, and the World Summit on Social Development at Johannesburg in 2002, all have taken forward the agenda of gender perspectives and inequalities that exist. It should be noted here that India ranks 127 among 177 countries in terms of the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) and 98 in terms of Gender Development Index (GDI). In respect of the Gender Empowerment Measure, the position is reflected in the fact that women hold only 9.3% of total seats of Parliament in India and ratio of estimated female to male earned income is 0.38.

### **Box 3:**

#### **LEGAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

##### **Laws related to protection of rights of working women**

- Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966
- Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976
- Cine Workers and Cinema theatre Workers (Regulation of employment) Act, 1981
- Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970
- Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- Factories Act, 1948
- Inter -State Migrant Workers ( Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service Act, 1979
- Legal Practitioners (women) Act, 1923
- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Payment of Wages Act, 1936
- Plantations Labour Act, 1951
- Workmen's compensation Act, 1923
- Mines Act, 1952

True the Constitution of India guarantees rights to equality to women and men; but these are de-jure rights. When it comes to the de-facto realization of some of these rights, there are large gender gaps. Translating de-jure gender equality and the promise of justice, social, economic and political into de factor reality has been one of India's major challenges over the years. There is still unfortunately a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation and policies and the current status of Indian women. In order to bridge this gap and to ensure that legal safeguards actually reach women, the Government has set up a statutory National Commission for Women in 1992 charged with the responsibility of overseeing the working of constitutional safeguards for women, reviewing laws and regulations where necessary in this regard and intervening in selected individual cases of violation of women's rights and equality for issuing appropriate directives to the concerned authorities. It has been made mandatory for the Government of India and the Governments of States to report to Parliament its follow-up action on the recommendations of the Commission, and submit specific reasons in the event to disagreement with any of the Commission's recommendations.

**Box 4:**

**LEGAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

**Laws related to right to property**

- Married Women's Property Act, 1874
- Indian Succession Act, 1925
- Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937
- Hindu Succession Act, 1956

India is one of the few countries where males significantly outnumber females and this imbalance has increased over time. According to Population Census of India 2001, the sex ratio of the 0-6 age group has declined sharply from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. The sex ratio in urban areas confirms a lower incidence of women – 901 females per 1000 males. Also 47% of the urban India shows signs of lower female population. One reason for the adverse sex ratio is the increasing reluctance to have female children. This along with the social neglect of women and girls completes the picture.

Majority of women go through life in a state of nutritional stress – they are anaemic and malnourished. Poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of health care during pregnancy are the major reasons for both maternal and infant mortality. The average Indian woman bears her first child before she is 22 years old, and has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health. In rural India, almost 60 per cent of girls are

married before they are 18. Nearly 60 per cent of married girls bear children before they are 18. Nearly 60 per cent of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one third of all babies are born with low birth weight. The female mortality rate was 20.6 in the age-group 0-4 years (Government of India 2006b).

### **Box 5:**

## **LEGAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

### **Laws related to crimes against women**

#### **1. Crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC):**

- Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec.302/ 304-B of IPC)
- Molestation (Sec. 354 of IPC)
- Kidnapping & abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373 IPC)
- Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age) (Sec. 366-B of IPC)
- Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)
- Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498 –A of IPC)
- Sexual harassment (Sec. 509 of IPC) (referred to in the past as Eve teasing)

#### **2. Crimes identified under the special laws:**

- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (104 of 1956)
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961)
- Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 (60 of 1986)
- Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988)
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (43 of 2005)

52 per cent of women in general and 56% of women in the age group 15-19 are found to be anaemic. The health facilities and the use of these facilities leave a lot of room for unhygienic and almost near-fatal methods for childbirth in rural areas. Antenatal services are poor. Three fourths of deliveries still take place at homes, with 43 per cent conducted by untrained health professionals. According to the Sample Registration System of the

Registrar General of India (*ibid.*), the rural sector in 2003 recorded a very high percentage (56.5) of deliveries conducted at home by untrained village midwife or other untrained professional functionaries, but in the urban sector, about 60% of the delivery were in hospitals, or health centers, and 23% in homes conducted by doctors, trained midwife, or nurse.

Indian constitution guarantees free primary school education for both boys and girls up to the age of 14. Though this goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, the primary education in India is still not universal. Moreover, the females continue to lag behind the males on the literacy front. The Census 2001 indicates that only 54% of women are literate as compared to 75% of men (female literacy was 39 per cent in Census 1991). Female literacy is highest in Kerala (88%) and lowest in Bihar (33%). Also note that the Adult Literacy rate of females (aged 15 yrs and above) is only 48 as in 2001 against 73.4% for adult males. However, 14.6% females and 17.4% males are literate without educational level. Even when girls are enrolled in schools, fewer girls than boys manage to stay in school for a full ten years. More than 50 per cent girls drop out by the time they are in middle school.

As per the Department of Secondary and Higher Education (*ibid.*), the number of girls enrolled in primary classes in 2003-04 was only 88 per 100 boys and for middle classes it was 79 girls per 100 boys. In the secondary section, the ratio stood at 70 girls per 100 boys and the general education ratio in the colleges and universities was 65 girls per 100 boys. In 2002-03, there were 82 females per 100 males enrolled in arts stream in university education. For science, it was 61 girls per 100 males and in commerce, there were only 58 girls per 100 boys. The engineering and technical education had just 29 girls per 100 boys and in medicine there were only 71 girls enrolled per 100 boys. It was also reported that in 2003-04, at primary and middle school level, there were 66 and 69 female teachers respectively per 100 male teachers. At the higher secondary school level, the ratio was only 67 female teachers per 100 male teachers.

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (*ibid.*) female enrolment in 2003-04 in primary classes (age group 6-11 years) was 95%, in middle school (age group 11-14 years), 58% and in high/higher secondary classes (in the age group 14-18 years), 34%. As per National Family Health Survey, in rural as well as urban areas, the main reasons of females never attending school are 'expensive cost of education', 'not interested in studies', 'education is not considered necessary' and 'required for household work' (*ibid.*).

Women have the right to choose where to live. However, marriage and kinship systems still preserve the structures of patriarchy. Except in the matrilineal societies of Kerala or the North Eastern parts of India, the predominant system of patrilocal residence means that women live with their fathers before marriage and their husbands after marriage. Limited economic options and limited education and training restrict mobility and can aggravate the situation in cases where women are exposed to familial violence and oppression. Even where these fetters do not exist, fear of gender based violence and socio-cultural norms often works against mobility. Marriage can therefore be thought of as a framework that serves to exchange women between households, and marriage

decisions are made with a view toward ensuring that this exchange of women promises the maximum gain to both households. The man's household is the point of reference while the woman is simply an input into the processes for households controlled by men to generate economic and social returns.

Over 70 percent of India's population currently derive their livelihood from land resources, which includes 84 percent of the economically active women. However, women's work in general remains undervalued and unrecognised. Women work longer hours than men, and carry the major share of household and community work that is unpaid and invisible. There are far fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men. There are more unemployed women than there are unemployed men. Women generally earn lower wage than men doing the same work. It has been estimated that women's wage rates are, on the average, only 75% of men's wage rates and constitute only one fourth of the family income. In no State do women and men earn equal wages in agriculture. Also, women generally work in the informal sector where wages are lower and they are not covered by labour laws. Within organisations, women generally hold lower-paid jobs. Women workers are also engaged in piecework and subcontracting at exploitative rates.

With a view to estimating properly the contribution of women in the national economy and to study the gender discrimination in household activities, a pilot Time Use Survey was conducted in 18,620 household spread over six selected states, namely, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya during the period June 1998 to July 1999. The survey was first of its kind in India and even among the developing countries. It was observed that women spend about 2.1 hours per day on cooking food and about 1.1 hours on cleaning the households and utensils. Men's participation in these activities is nominal. Taking care of children is also one of the major responsibilities of women, as they spend about 3.16 hours per week on these activities as compared to only 0.32 hours by males (*ibid.*).

Coming to the formal financial experience of women, only about 26% of bank accounts in commercial banks belong to females. The share (in terms of amounts deposited) of females in total deposited amount is 21%. The statistics of Life Insurance Corporation of India as on 31 March 2002 indicate that 17% of females had Life Insurance Policy but the share of females in terms of sum assured was only 16% (*ibid.*).

Although Indian women played a major role in the freedom movement, it did not translate into continued participation in public life in the post-independence era. Many women withdrew into their homes, secure in the belief that they had ushered in a democratic republic in which the dreams and aspirations of the mass of people would be achieved. As a result, especially in a patriarchal social-political system, women now remain under-represented in governance and decision-making positions. At present, women occupy less than 13% of Parliamentary seats, less than 14% Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court, and less than 12% positions as administrators and managers. In 2004, out of 29 Cabinet Ministers, there was only one female Cabinet Minister and 6 female Ministers of State (MOS), out of 39 MOS. As in December 2005, there was only one Female Judge out of 22 Judges in the Supreme

Court. In the High Courts, there were only 34 Female Judges among the total of 548 judges (*ibid.*).

However, through the experience of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRI) and Urban Local Bodies, more than one million women have actively entered political life in India, owing to one-third reservation in these bodies through the 73rd and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution. These amendments have spearheaded an unprecedented social experiment, which is playing itself out in more than 500,000 villages that are home to more than 600 million people. Women heading one third of the *panchayats* and are gradually learning to use their new prerogatives, have transformed local governance by sensitising the State to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Since the creation of the quota system, local women, the vast majority of them being illiterate and poor, have come to occupy as much as 43% of the seats, spurring the election of increasing numbers of women at the district, provincial and national levels. Since the advent of PRI, the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen from 4-5% to 25-40%.

As regards the decision making power of women at home in India, we have some results from the National Family Health Survey II (1998-99); in the rural area, females took 71% decisions regarding 'what items to cook', 26% decisions on obtaining health care for herself and 10% in the case of purchasing Jewellery or other major household items. 12% decisions were taken by females in respect of going and staying with her parents or siblings, and 37% decisions regarding 'how the money she earns will be used'. For urban area, these figures were 71%, 35%, 13%, 18% and 57% respectively. Further, in the age group of 15-19 years, 24% of women are not involved in any kind of decision making and only 14% do not ask permission to go to the market. In the rural sector, 10% females are not involved in any decision-making and 74% need permission for going to the market. In the urban sector, only 7% of urban resident women are not involved in any decision making and 53% of urban resident women need permission for going to the market. It is found that 52% illiterate women, 74% of urban resident and 55% of rural resident female have access to money (*ibid.*).

Finally coming to the crime scene, as per the data of 2004 of National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs (*ibid.*), among the crimes committed against women, torture shares the highest percentage (37.7%), followed by molestation (22.4%), rape (11.8%), kidnapping (10.1%), abduction (8.8%), and immoral traffic (3.7%). It is also significant to note that 6.5% cases are of eve-teasing and 4.6% of dowry deaths. There were 532 victims of rape up to 10 years, 1090 in the age group 10-14 years, 2004 in the age group of 14-18 years, 11,343 in the age group 18-23 years, 3189 in the age group of 30-50 years. And 81 in the age group greater than 50 years. In the same year, out of the total juvenile delinquency, 6.7% were girls. Also, the rate of incidence of crime per lakh population was 1.8.

Constitutionally women have equal access to legal services but because of low levels of education, limited exposure to laws and legal procedures, social taboos and limited financial means, women cannot always utilize legal services. The government has sought

to remedy this condition by providing legal aid, legal literacy and promulgating the Family Courts Act.

Similarly although women have the legal capacity to enter into contracts in their own names, relatively few women do so in practice because of the very limited property that they hold. In spite of the Hindu succession Act granting equal inheritance rights to female heirs, except in case of co-parcenary property, in practice women are invariably coaxed into relinquishing such rights in favour of their male relations. Even co-parcenary rights have been granted on equal terms to women in some states but they tend to remain on paper only.

### **3. Gender Development through the Five-Year Plans**

The approach to women's development in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was not clear. The women's question was perceived as primarily a social one by the major section of the political leadership and the bureaucracy and the role of the State in social issues was viewed with great hesitation and caution. Significantly, issues identified by the National Planning Committee's Sub-Committee on Women ('Women in a planned Economy', 1941) were not considered by the official planners after a decade later.<sup>2</sup> Instead women were projected as beings in need of education, health and welfare services only

However, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), set up in 1953, identified the problem of absence of any governmental machinery at most levels for women-oriented welfare-related activities and undertook to promote a number of welfare measures through voluntary organizations, encouraging women's organizations to take up such activities in partnership with government. Promotion of organizations of women at various levels, especially at the grassroots, was at the heart of this strategy. *Mahila Mandals* were promoted as delivery mechanisms for essential services of education, health, especially maternal and child health, etc., both by the CSWB and the Community Development Programme through the first and the second Five Year Plans.

This combination of institution building and human resource development was also expected to prepare women to participate in the political and developmental processes. Thus, though the language of these strategies reflected contemporary meaning of 'welfare' there was a conceptual thrust (even though inadequately articulated) towards actively involving and stimulating the participation of women's organizations in the processes of change. However, increasing bureaucratic control, top-down designing and streamlining of programmes and declining resource support to organizations and institutional development from below both reflected and contributed to the low priority and non-serious approach to basic issues in promotion of gender equality.

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<sup>2</sup> The Indian National Congress constituted the national Planning Committee in 1938 to chalk out blueprints for independent India's development. One of the 29 sub-committees formed was on women, established in 1939 to review the social economic and legal status of women and to suggest measures to make equality of status and opportunity a possibility in the planned economy of free India.

The Third, Fourth and Fifth Plans, including the four years of Plan holiday before the Fifth Plan continued the same approach, with declining support to the strategies of organization building and human resource development. Some priority was accorded to women's education after the Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59). Planners, however failed to address the major problems of poverty, illiteracy, non-enrollment, drop out, etc. that affected the acquired increasing priority. Family Planning services, though introduced within the health services, very quickly and increasingly dominated the health services, with separate allocations and staff. Repeated directives from the Planning Commission, from the 4<sup>th</sup> Plan onwards to integrate Family Planning with (maternal and child health??) MCH were not implemented. Programmes for supplementary nutrition of children and nursing and expectant mothers from disadvantaged groups were introduced by the Welfare Department but received far less priority and resources and no integration with MCH. These approaches came in for criticism in the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1971-74)

The pre-independence planning document had addressed women's economic, civil and social rights. However, despite the provisions of the Directive Principles of State Policy, economic rights and needs were not really built into the first five plans. Labour laws, valid only for the organized secondary sector, had incorporated most of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions before planning started. Maternity benefits were enacted in 1961, but not equal remuneration. While, both these principles were incorporated into public service rules (with a few exceptions), child care support for women was not included. Service rules were the responsibility of the Home Ministry, labour laws of the Labour Ministry. Some sectors of government (e.g. Railways, Defence Services, Insurance, Mining, etc.) continued discriminatory and exclusionary practices against women because there was no comprehensive policy or law applicable to all categories of women workers. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on population control highlighted women's reproductive, rather than their productive roles, influencing 'populationist' approach to women's development needs.

The Committee pointed out that Plans for development of agriculture, industry, fishery. Livestock and other major sectors of the Indian economy contained no acknowledgement of the millions of women involved in these sectors for a livelihood. In fact, women had been increasingly viewed by the planners as not in need of an independent livelihood, to the point where women's decreasing work participation rate and share of employment, increasing poverty and insecurity in sectors of the economy in which they used to dominate earlier (agriculture, forestry, livestock, cottage industry, sericulture, fisheries, retail) were not even viewed as unfortunate problems of change. This process of marginalisation of the large majority of women in the economy and their consequent neglect and devaluation by the society and the State, were demonstrations of gender class and urban bias.

Treating the declining sex ratio as a composite indicator of the worsening situation of the majority of women, the Committee demonstrated that this process, begun much earlier, had been accelerated during the period of planned development. The increasing investment on education, health and the opening of opportunities for public employment

had benefited a small minority, widening the gap between this minority and the majority of women. Even amongst the privileged minority, the promise of gender equality was threatened by escalation of social practices like dowry, continued inequality in personal laws (including Hindu Law which had been 'reformed' after independence) non-enforcement of existing laws, which sought to offer some protection to women (e.g. labour laws or criminal law), and the 'invisibility' of women's needs, concerns and perspectives in the planning process

### **Conceptual Advance and the Politics of Planning Women's Development**

It was only during 1977-80 that some serious exercises in policy review were taken up. Amongst these, the three most significant exercises were the Report of the Working Group on Employment of Women (1977-78), Report of the Working Group on Development of Village Level Organizations of rural Women (1977-78), Report of the Working Group on Adult Education Programmes for Women (1977-78) and the Report of the National Committees on the Role and Participation of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development (1979-80).

These exercises definitely marked a watershed in conceptualizing basic problems and strategies for women's development in India. In fact, the Indian agenda even got incorporated into the United Nations and mid-Decade Programme of Action through the medium (mediacy?) of the Non-aligned Movement at the special Conference on Women and Development (Baghdad, 1979) and India's Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women (1978-80) as well as the Preparatory Committee for the Mid-Decade Copenhagen Conference (1980) and Programme of Action. The Secretary General of the Mid-Decade UN Conference acknowledged India's contribution to the emphasis on third world perspectives on development and the adoption of employment, health and education as a sub-scheme of the decade's agenda.

The conceptual approach evolved through these few years identified women's developmental needs as having multiple dimensions – cutting across economic, social and political sectors –requiring explicit examination of women's situation in various sectors (agriculture and allied fields, industry, labour and employment, power, environment, energy, science and technology as well as the social and infrastructural sectors). Such explicit examination called for three operational strategies:-

1. establishing cells within various sectoral development/planning agencies at different levels.
2. earmarking of a share of various sectoral allocations for investment in women rather than relegate women to only women-specific programmes and women-specific agencies; and
3. promoting rural employment and development through women's own collective organizations, at the grassroots (It should be noted that spontaneous indigenous models of such organizations had already emerged through the work of Self employed women's association (SEWA),<sup>3</sup> Working Women's Forum (WWF),<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> SEWA, a trade union registered in 1972 (in Ahmedabad), is an organisation of poor, self-employed women workers. It is the largest member based organization of poor

*Annapoorna Mahila Mandal*<sup>5</sup> and the economic, social and political dynamism they displayed offered hopes of empowerment for others elsewhere).

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1979-84) document released in December, 1979, contained definite admission of failure to remove disparity and injustice in both social and economic life. It also stated that the objective of population control could not be achieved without bringing about major changes in the status of women. Including women within the chapters on employment, manpower and rural development this document made a definite departure from earlier plans where women had been mentioned only in the chapters on social services. In suggesting the need for 'administrative innovation' and 'collection of sex-wise distribution data on development assistance', the plan acknowledged the previous neglect, the need for better information flow and new mechanisms to ensure women receive their 'due share' of government's attention and support and 'equal opportunity for growth and distributive justice'. Support for organizations of rural women was suggested on the same principles as organizations of the rural poor – to improve their 'bargaining power and access to development assistance'.

This conceptual advance however was not matched by prescriptive measures. With the change of government in 1980, this document became inoperative. A new Planning commission was appointed. It however remains significant as a stepping stone to later stages of women's development – from 1980 onwards.

### **Pressure from the Women's Movement**

*The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)*

The Framework for the 6<sup>th</sup> Plan, released by the new Planning Commission in August 1980 reverted women back to the social services and did not reflect any of the home work undertaken by various official expert groups between 1975-80. Nor did it reflect approaches and the perspective advocated by Indian delegations to international conferences of the UN or the Non-aligned Movement.

It was from this point that intervention by national women's organizations began to make some impact on the planning process. It began a period of partnership and alliance between the few cells on women created within the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Social Welfare and Rural Development, and the growing women's movement and scholars specialising in women's studies. A memorandum submitted jointly by seven women's organizations in 1980 and support from women members of

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working women in India.

<sup>4</sup> Working Women's Forum (India) is a social organisation initiated in 1978 in Chennai to develop the total human resource potential of very poor women workers in the informal sector.

<sup>5</sup> Registered in 1975, *Annapoorna Mahila Mandal* represents women who are organised, socially aware, economically independent and self-reliant. Its focus is to aid and empower low-income group women living in slums of Mumbai, particularly *Khanawalis*, who cook for factory workers. *Annapurna* is the Goddess of food.

Parliament persuaded the Planning Commission to incorporate for the first time in India's planning history a chapter on Women and Development.

This Chapter acknowledged the continued low status of women as a result of inadequate opportunities of independent employment and income, referred to demographic trends (higher mortality, lower economic participation, literacy, sex-ratio etc.) as issues of serious concern and went on to define a multipronged but inter-dependent strategy for women's development which by its very nature would be dependent on the total development process. Emphasis on the 'family-centered' poverty alleviation strategy (which invited attacks from women in development (WID) scholars through the 1980s) was qualified by the statement that 'economic independence would accelerate improvement of women's status'.

A marked improvement in the redistributive policies of government was the promise that in cases of transferred assets such as agricultural and homestead land, government shall endeavour to provide joint title to husband and wife.

Strengthening of voluntary organizations of women at the grassroots was advocated for creating a proper climate for the introduction of social legislation as well as for its effective implementation and the provision of legal aid. Such grassroots organizations were also necessary as channels for women to participate effectively in decisions that affect their lives and for promoting adequate development efforts for women at different levels. There were definite suggestions for active promotion of such collectives by the government and linking them with institutions which could provide support in various forms.

For education the emphasis was on special support services to expand women's access to all types of education. The need for child care services as a support for education of girls as well as for working mothers of different classes was acknowledged and public services requested to provide them for their women colleagues. However, the Labour Ministry's innovative plans for a National Programme for Child Care and Maternity Benefit in partnership between the government and all other employers (which had received verbal support of national trade unions and women organizations in 1979) were not taken up.

The institution of a women's quota and the formula of one-third made its appearance within the TRYSEM programme.<sup>6</sup> There was a general statement that it would be better to expand co-educational institutions rather than promote separate women's polytechnics. Similarly, instead of relegating women's employment to some women-prone sectors, the Sixth Plan proposed 'corrective measures' in sectors where women's employment is low or on the decline.

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<sup>6</sup> The TRYSEM (Training to Rural Youth for Self Employment), initiated in July 1979, was a centrally sponsored scheme launched as facilitating component of Integrated rural Development Programme (IRDP). The TRYSEM is to provide technical skills to rural youth to enable them to take up self employment in the broad fields of agriculture and allied activities, industries, services and business activities.

### *The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)*

With the twin emphasis on employment and productivity in the Seventh Plan the Approach paper highlighted the strategy of a direct attack on the problems of poverty, unemployment and regional imbalance with 'accelerated development of human resources'. There was greater emphasis on the provision of gainful employment to the unemployed – particularly women and youth. The strategy of organizing women around socio-economic activities was reiterated, for the twin objectives of making their projects economically viable and adding to their social strength for overall development of their status.

The Chapter of the Actual Plan document demonstrated some advance in the use of feminist language (the role of 'the predominant order in confining women in an oppressive environment') a substantive acknowledgement of women's important role in agriculture and allied sectors and the existence of a gap between the actual social reality and its perception by society at large. However, in identifying concrete strategies there was a tendency to slide back into women-specific sectors and a refusal to extend the quota or the special component plan approach.

Meanwhile, women's organizations and scholars were reviewing the charges and pooling their ideas and demands to place before the government. Preparations were on for the end of the decade UN Conference at Nairobi. The Government of India hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Conference on Women and Development to offer inputs to the Nairobi meet in 1984, in an ILO-sponsored Afro-Asian Conference on Rural Women's Organizations and Development. India's approaches and experiments – official and non-official – had received encouraging appreciation from both Asian and African participants. The report, titled 'Women Resources and Power' contained many of the lessons of possible generation of employment, reduction of poverty, education, improvement of productivity and women's empowerment through the strategy of increased investment in collective organizations of poor rural women, building on their existing expertise and skills at the initial stage.

These background events encouraged the Department of Rural Development and Women and Child Development and Ministry of Labour and Employment to adopt some bold measures. They represented greater clarity and commitment on the part of those Ministries/Departments which had undertaken some serious rethinking, information, gathering and investment efforts in their expectation of a distinct change in political priorities.

Despite the Plan document not adopting the 'special component' or the quota approach – the Department of Rural Development announced a 30% quota for women in all anti-poverty programmes for the rural areas, in addition to the women-specific experimental programme (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) introduced midway through the 6<sup>th</sup> Plan. Concurrent evaluation of all these programmes by independent research institutions began a periodic monitoring and regular reporting to Parliament of progress of achievement in the women's quota. Steps were initiated to begin gender sensitization as a mandatory part of training of rural development officials.

A special Task Force appointed by the Department of Rural Development recommended that such mandatory inclusion of gender sensitization was necessary for all training of public servants of all categories. This recommendation – supported by the Department of Rural Development and Women and Child Development – evoked a positive response from the Department of Personnel and Training.

Another thrust, emerging from some experimental training programmes sponsored by the Department of Rural Development and Women and Child Development was an attempt to make organization of beneficiaries a central and common element in all programmes targeting poor women. Innovative, flexible programmes with this aim were introduced by the Department of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Labour.

The new government had also converted the Division for Women's Welfare and Development, till then a part of the Ministry of Social Welfare, into a full Department of Women and Child Development and transferred it to the Ministry of Human Resource Development along with the Department of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs.

The preparation for a new Educational Policy marked another occasion for gender advocacy. Women's organizations and women's studies groups mounted a systematic pressure from outside. They enrolled persons interested in educational reform – even the University Grants Commission to lobby for a new role for educational institutions – as conscious promoters of the value of gender equality. To play this role effectively, teachers, students and educational administrators needed greater exposure and involvement in women's struggles to change their marginalized, subordinate and oppressed status – which could eventually change their perceptions and views about women's actual roles, contributions, burdens and oppression. This mental transformation could make conventional instruments like curriculum change, research and training powerful ideological tools to alter the mindsets of future generations.

All these efforts and pressures from the women's movement and internal struggle within government resulted in the incorporation of two paragraphs on Education for Women's Equality within the National Policy on Education. For the first time it carried the message that along with expanding women's access to all kinds of education, the system, with all its institutions, had to shoulder a major responsibility for genuine empowerment of women, by changing the social construction of gender. Conceptually, it was a breakthrough.

Another breakthrough was on the issue of effective representation of women in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs). Government of India's decision to prepare a National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women began a flurry of activities under the aegis of the Department of Women and Child Development. A parallel move was the appointment of the National Commission for Self-Employed Women (NCSEW) – to help articulate the problems, needs and aspirations of working women in the informal sector – many of them still missing in national statistics of workers and economic activity.

The NPP (1988) wanted to increase women's participation and presence at decision-making levels in local self government bodies, state assemblies and Parliament. Suggesting a 30% reservation at all these levels, the NPP proposed that the seats may have to be filled by nomination in the early years.

#### *Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-97)*

The Eighth Plan was formulated against the backdrop of the New Economic policy which brought about a process of macro-economic stabilization and structural adjustment processes. The new features of the section on Women's Development were a paragraph on violence against women and a two-page 'Situational Analysis', which highlights the problems of higher mortality, lower education and increasing unemployment of women, 'the conceptual, methodological and perception' biases regarding value of women's work, compounded by women's concentration in the informal sector, resulting in casualisation, non-protection of labour laws and inaccessibility to credit, technology and other types of development assistance.

The strategy in the Eighth Plan was to 'ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programmes are implemented to complement the general programmes'. The strategy of formation and strengthening of grassroots organizations to 'articulate local women's needs and play an important role in decentralized planning and implementation' was reiterated. Convergence and integration of services offered by health, education, employment and welfare programmes at the grass roots level was emphasized.

There was a paragraph on the girl child with the promise of 'special programmes.' Education and nutrition, legal literacy and 'changes in social attitudes and perceptions in regard to the role of women' were mentioned as essential for empowerment. However, women were mentioned only in the context of women-specific programmes. There was no mention of a women's quota or an earmarked share of allocations.

The most dramatic development during this period was the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> (Constitutional) Amendment in 1992 which conferred constitutional status on the institutions of local governance, mandated regular elections and wider powers/resources and reserved one-third of seats for women, including among the already reserved categories of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs and STs) and office bearers at different levels of these bodies. States which held elections after 1993 experienced no difficulty in obtaining women's response, as voters and as candidates.

In the general elections of 1996, most political parties conceded women's demand for reservation at state and national levels also. The new government placed this in the Common Minimum Programme. Though a bill reserving one-third of seats in Parliament and State Legislatures for women was put up before Parliament, it still remains as a hot promise on the election agenda even after more than a decade.

Special initiatives undertaken for the well-being of women during the Eighth Plan period were:

1. Setting up of National Commission for Women in 1992 to safeguard the interests of women.
2. Setting up of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh in 1993 to meet the credit needs of poor and assetless women.
3. Adoption of the National Nutritional Policy in 1993 to fulfil the constitutional commitment of improving the nutritional status of people in general and in particular that of the children, adolescent girls, expectant and nursing mothers.
4. Launching of the scheme of Mahila Samridhi Yojana in 1993 which sought to empower women by institutionalizing their savings so that they could have greater control over household resources.
5. Launching of Indira Mahila Yojana in 1995, advocating an integrated approach for women's empowerment through Self Help Groups.
6. Proposal for setting up of National Resource Centre of Women.
7. Formulation of a draft of National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (1996).

The setting up of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) in 1993 fulfilled a long awaited initiative of having a national level mechanism to meet the credit needs of poor and assetless women in the informal sector. It facilitates credit support / micro-financing to poor and assetless women struggling in the informal sector, works through the medium of NGOs as its channelising agencies for identification of borrowers, delivery of credit support and also recovery. While the lending rate of RMK both for short and medium-term loans is 8% per annum to NGOs, the ultimate borrowers or their Self Help Groups pay 12% per annum. Till the end of Eighth Plan in 1997 RMK has extended credit worth Rs.35.14 crores through 170 NGOs benefiting about 1.91 lakh women all over the country. In addition RMK also supports its NGO partners, to form Women's Thrift and Credit Societies, which are popularly known as Self Help Groups. About 60000 women received credit during 1997-98. Right from its inception, RMK maintained a recovery rate of 92-95 per cent. The programme of Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY), launched in 1993, promoted self-reliance amongst rural women by encouraging thrift and savings. For a maximum deposit of Rs.300/- with a lock-in-period of one year, the Government provided an incentive of Rs.75/-.

Yet another major initiative undertaken during the Eighth Plan was launching of Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) advocating social empowerment through awareness generation and conscientisation programmes and economic empowerment through income generation activities on a sustained basis. The scheme was launched in 1995 in 200 ICDS blocks on a pilot basis. By July, 1998, 260 Indira Mahila Block Samities (IMBSs) had been registered out of which 140 IMBS were registered during the year 1997-98. Till March, 1998, 28000 Self-Help Groups of women were formed with services of both

income generation and awareness generation, of which 21,000 women's groups were formed in 1997-98.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up a statutory body in 1992 to safeguard the rights and interests of women. The NCW has gained credentials of many success stories in the areas of – offering pre-litigated counselling to aggrieved women, attending to / investigating into the individual complaints received from all over the country, looking into the special problems of services, women / child sex workers, women in custody / jails, women in mental asylums, women with disabilities, deserted women etc. It also reviews both women-specific and women-related legislations and advises the Government to bring forth necessary amendments from time to time. It also moves around the whole country to enquire/investigate problems of women belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged groups, especially those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It also set up Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats; Open Adalats (Public Hearings) is the style adopted by the Commission to hear the individual grievances and to pay personal attention to the women in need. This special feature of the Commission has reached the judiciary to women at their door-step.

#### *Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)*

The Approach Paper to the Ninth Plan which was made public in January 1997 marked other watershed in the history of Indian Planning. It declared the Empowerment of Women as one of the objectives of the Plan and the transfer of control of social infrastructure in the public sphere to women's groups as a strategy of the Plan. The Approach Paper calls for women's component plan as a part of the plan of each sector to identify the flow of benefits to and impact of plans and programmes on women. It calls for reliance on women's self help groups as a strategy. It declares the flow of benefits to women and children as one of the fundamental criteria for determination of allocation priorities.

The planning process has evolved over the years from purely 'welfare' oriented approach where women were regarded as objects of charity to the development programmes and currently to their 'empowerment'. As already explained, it was only from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards that women secured a special niche and space in the national plans and planning process primarily with thrusts on health, education and employment of women; and a paradigm shift occurred in the Eighth Plan where 'empowerment' of women was recognized and accepted as a distinct strategy.

A further impetus for sectoral contribution to women's programmes was received with the introduction of the concept of Women's Component Plan in the Ninth Plan whereby identified Ministries were required to indicate the flow of funds to the women's programs and schemes. However the Ninth Plan refrained from making any commitment for achieving any specific goal or target. This was overcome to some extent in the Tenth Plan where for the first time, monitorable targets were set for a few key indicators of human development. The targets include, among other things, reduction in gender gaps in literacy and wage rates and reduction in MMR.

'Empowerment of Women as the agents of social change and development' being one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan, the following strategies were suggested:

1. To create an enabling environment for women to exercise their rights, both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men through early finalisation and adoption of 'National Policy for Empowerment of Women'.
2. To expedite action to legislate reservation of not less than 1/3 seats for women in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies and thus ensure adequate representation of women in decision making.
3. To adopt an integrated approach towards empowering women through effective convergence of existing services, resources, infrastructure and manpower in both women specific and women related sectors.
4. To adopt a special strategy of 'Women's Component Plan' to ensure that not less than 30 percent of funds/benefits flow to women from other developmental sectors.
5. To organise women into Self help group and thus mark the beginning of a major process of empowering women.
6. To accord high priority to reproductive child health care.
7. To universalise the on-going supplementary feeding programme- Special Nutrition Programme (SNP) and Mid Day Meals(MDM).
8. To ensure easy and equal access to education for women and girls through the commitments of the Special Action Plan of 1998.
9. To initiate steps to eliminate gender bias in all educational programmes.
10. To institute plans for free education for girls upto college level, including professional courses.
11. To equip women with necessary skills in the modern upcoming trades which could keep them gainfully engaged besides making them economically independent and self-reliant.
12. To increase access to credit through setting up of a Development Bank for Women Entrepreneurs in small and tiny sectors.

Organising women into Self-Help Groups was recognized as marking the beginning of a major process of empowering women, and the institutions thus developed as providing a permanent forum for articulating their needs and contributing their perspectives to development. Recognising the fact that women had been socialised only to take a back

seat in public life, affirmative action through deliberate strategies were demanded to be initiated to provide equal access to and control over factors contributing to such empowerment, particularly in the areas of health, education, information, life-long learning for self development, vocational skills, employment and income generating opportunities, land and other forms of property including through inheritance, common property, resources, credit, technology and markets etc. To this effect, the newly elected women members and the women Chairpersons of Panchayats and the Local Bodies had to be sensitised through special training package to take the lead in ensuring that adequate funds/benefits flow towards the empowerment of women and the girl child.

As the representation of women in the decision-making levels has a direct bearing on all the affirmative actions directed towards their well-being and empowerment, the Plan document promised that every effort would be made to ensure that women are in adequate numbers at the decision-making levels. To this effect, it was suggested to encourage women with special coaching facilities to compete in the competitive examinations which provide them a direct entry into the path of decision-making levels. Similarly, a need was felt for women to be active in public life and take part in the political decision-making process, as political decisions/ political will in favour of women can influence a lot in creating an enabling environment for women to empower themselves. Towards this, the Plan, as in previous years, promised in vain to expedite action to legislate reservation of not less than 1/3 of the total seats for women both in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.

Underscoring that economic empowerment of women is mainly related to their participation in decision-making with regard to raising and distribution of resources, i.e. income, investments and expenditures at all levels, the Plan suggested for special efforts to enhance their capacity to earn besides enlarging their access to and control/ ownership of family/community assets. With access to economic assets, it was pointed out that women would be encouraged to take up self-employment through various entrepreneurial ventures which are more convenient and allow them to play their dual role, within and outside home, effectively.

Thus in line with the Eight Plan Strategy of providing 'Near full employment', the Government reset its priorities to accord special emphasis to keep women gainfully engaged through employment cum income generation activities. The ultimate objective of all these efforts was to make women economically independent and self-reliant. Some of the important initiatives thus undertaken in this direction included launching of programmes viz., 'Work and Wage', 'Learn while you earn', 'Credit for Entrepreneurial / Self Employment Ventures', Employment Guaranty Schemes etc. both in rural and urban areas. While programmes like Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Support for Training and Employment (STEP), Training cum Employment cum Production Centres (TEPC), popularly known as NORAD, were some of the important women-specific employment cum training programmes, in addition to other programmes like, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment Programmes (TRYSEM), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY), Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY) which extended 30 to 40 % reservation of benefits

for women.

The Department of Women and Child Development being the National Machinery for Empowering Women in the country was made responsible for mainstreaming women into national development by raising their overall status on par with that of men. The Department, in its nodal capacity, formulates policies, plans and programmes, and enacts/ amends legislations affecting women and guides/co-ordinates/ streamlines the efforts of both Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations working to improve the lot of women in the country. The programmes of the Department include: continuing education and training; employment and income generation; welfare and support services and gender sensitisation and awareness generation. These programmes of innovative nature play the role of being both supplementary and complementary to the other general development programmes in the sectors of health, education, labour and employment, rural and urban development etc.

Special initiatives/ achievements for the Empowerment of women during the Ninth plan were:

1. Adoption of Women's Component Plan (WCP) to ensure that benefits from other developmental sectors do not by-pass women and not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits flow to them from all the women-related sectors. Review of the progress of WCP during the Ninth Plan reveals that funds flowing from one of the women-related Departments (viz. Family Welfare) was as high as 70 per cent of its Gross Budgetary Support of the Ninth Plan (1997).
2. Launching of 'Swa-Shakti' to create an enabling environment for empowerment of women through setting up of self-reliant Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and developing linkages with lending institutions to ensure women's access to credit facilities for income-generation activities (1998).
3. 'Stree Shakti Puraskars' instituted for the first time in the history of women's development to honour 5 distinguished women annually for their outstanding contribution to the upliftment and empowerment of women (1999).
4. Setting up of a Task Force on Women under the Chairpersonship of Shri K.C.Pant, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission to review the existing women-specific and women-related legislations and suggest enactment of new legislations or amendments, wherever necessary.
5. The Task Force also suggested a thematic programme for celebrating the year '2001 as Women's Empowerment Year', besides reviewing 22 existing legislations (2000).
6. Introduction of Gender Budgeting to attain more effective targetting of public expenditure and to offset any undesirable gender-specific consequences of previous budgetary measures (2000-01).

7. Adoption of a National Policy for Empowerment of Women to eliminate all types of discrimination against women and to ensure gender justice, besides empowering women both socially and economically (2001).
8. Celebration of the Year 2001 as 'Women's Empowerment Year' to create awareness generation, remove negative thinking, besides building up confidence in women through the processes of conscientization so that they can take their rightful place in the mainstream of the nation's social, political and economic life (2001).
9. Recasting of Indira Mahila Yojana as 'Swayamsidha', - an integrated programme for empowerment of women through a major strategy of converging the services available in all the women-related programmes besides organising women into SHGs for undertaking various entrepreneurial ventures (2001).
10. Launching of 'Swadhar' to extend rehabilitation services for 'Women in Difficult Circumstances' (2001).
11. Introduction of a Bill on Domestic Violence against Women (Prevention) to eliminate all forms of domestic violence against women and the girl child (2002).

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

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- (ii) 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;
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- (iv) 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.;
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and

- involvement of both men and women;
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process;
  - (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
  - (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

One of the policy prescriptions for economic empowerment of women in the National Policy is related to microcredit: "In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new, and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit" (Paragraph 5.2).

It should also be noted that the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), the premier micro-credit agency with its focus on women and their economic empowerment through the provision of credit to poor and assetless women in the informal sector through Voluntary Organisations, Women's Development Corporations, Women's Co-operative Societies, Block Samitis under the Swayamsidha programme, had since its inception sanctioned credit worth Rs. 109.73 crore benefiting 4.2 lakh women through 992 Voluntary Organisations/NGOs; and disbursed Rs. 82.38 crore upto February 2002.

National Commission for Women (NCW), the statutory body set up in 1992, to safeguard the rights and interests of women continued to pursue its mandated role and activities; viz. safeguarding women's rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities; sexual harassment of women at work place; conducting Parivarik/Mahila Lok Adalats, legal awareness programmes/camps; review of both women-specific and women-related legislations; investigates into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc. and takes suo moto remedial action to restore their legitimate rights. NCW, since its inception, had investigated into a total number of 24,025 complaints, wherein dowry deaths and dowry harassments accounted for the maximum number. Out of the 41 legislations having direct bearing on women, the Commission reviewed and suggested remedial legislative measures in 32 Acts and forwarded the same to the government for necessary action, besides drafting a Bill on Sexual Harassment at the Work Places and a Bill on SAARC Regional Convention for Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children.

Amongst its success stories, the Commission requested the State Governments to reserve a certain percentage of resources for women even at the village level for programmes such as water supply, health services, nutrition, sanitation, etc. and reviewed the functioning of women's cells in governmental organisations and issued fresh guidelines to reactivate the cells. It had also organized many seminars/workshops on important emerging problems of women, viz. impact of globalisation on women, prevention of

atrocities against women, economic empowerment of tribal women, girl child abuse, child marriages, empowerment of Dalit women, women in prostitution, images of women in the electronic media, rehabilitation of devadasis, besides conducting legal awareness camps in those states like Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc. where the status of women is comparatively lower. The Commission had also been very successfully documenting information on many important social problems like that of rape, abortion, devadasis, sexual harassment, etc. besides sponsoring studies on various subjects related to women.

*Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07)*

The approach to the Tenth Plan for empowering women was found to be distinct from that of the earlier Plans, as it now had a strong Platform for Action with definite goals, targets and a time-frame. Further, as the process of empowering women initiated during the Ninth Plan was expected to continue through and beyond the Tenth Plan, there could be no better approach than translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) into action through the following measures:

1. Creating an environment, through positive economic and social policies, for the development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
2. Allowing the de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women on par with men in all spheres - political, economic, social, cultural and civil;
3. Providing equal access to participation and decision-making for women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
4. Ensuring 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 the 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 into the development process;
8. Eliminating 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, corporate and private sector agencies.

The Operational strategy, as prescribed in the National Policy, directed all the Central Ministries and State Departments to draw up Time-Bound Action Plans for translating the Policy into a set of concrete actions through a participatory process of consultations with all the concerned, both in the governmental and non-governmental sectors. Accordingly, the first step in this direction was to prepare a National Plan of Action for implementation of the Policy by the nodal Department of Women and Child Development through identifying its partners; specifying Action Points in all the women-related development sectors; developing an in-built mechanism for effective co-ordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Policy; besides evaluating/ assessing the impact of the implementation of Policy in improving the status of women, based on a Gender Development Index.

The Approach to the commitments of the tenth plan to empower women was to continue with the major strategy of 'Empowering Women as Agents of Social Change and Development'. It called for a 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 goals.

- **Social Empowerment:** to create an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potentials.
- **Economic Empowerment:** to ensure provision of training, employment and income-generation activities with both 'forward' and 'backward' linkages with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant; and
- **Gender Justice:** to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus, allow women to enjoy not only the de-jure but also the de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz. political, economic, social, civil, cultural etc.

The Plan document further detailed the strategies to be undertaken to achieve

### **Social Empowerment**

by creating an enabling environment by means of adopting various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realise their full potentials through

1. Providing easy and equal access to ensure basic minimum services of primary health care and family welfare with a special focus on the under-served and under-privileged segments of population through universalising Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) services;
2. Achieving the goals set by the National Population Policy (2000) with regard to

reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) to 30 per thousand and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) to 100 per lakh live births by 2010;

3. Supplementing health care and nutrition services through the Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) to fill the critical gaps in the existing primary health care infrastructure and nutrition services;
4. Tackling both macro and micro-nutrient deficiencies through nutrition supplementary feeding programmes with necessary support services like health check-ups, immunisation, health and nutrition education and nutrition awareness etc.;
5. Consolidating the progress made under female education and carrying it forward for achieving the set goal of 'Education for Women's Equality' as advocated by the National Policy on Education, 1986 (revised in 1992);
6. Providing easy and equal access to and free education for women and girls at all levels and in the field of technical and vocational education and training in up-coming and job-oriented trades;
7. Increasing enrolment/retention rates and reducing drop-out rates by expanding the support services through mid-day meals, hostels and incentives like free supply of uniforms, textbooks, transport charges etc.;
8. Extending the existing network of regional vocational training centres to all the states and Women's Industrial Training Institutes and Women's Wings with General Industrial Training Institutes with residential facilities in all districts and sub-districts and provision of training in marketable trades;
9. Encouraging the media to project positive images of women and the Girl Child; change the mind-set of the people and thus promote the balanced portrayals of women and men; and
10. Gender sensitising both the administrative and enforcement machinery and ensuring that the rights and interests of women are taken care of, besides involving them in planning, implementation and monitoring of processes.

### **Economic Empowerment**

by ensuring provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both 'forward' and 'backward' linkages with the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self-reliant through

1. Organising women into Self-Help Groups under various poverty alleviation programmes, viz. Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Swarna

Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Support for Training and Employment Programme (STEP), Training-cum-Production Centres for Women (NORAD) etc. and offering them a range of economic options along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities and earning capacities with an ultimate objective of making them economically independent and self-reliant;

2. Ensuring that women in the Informal Sector who account for more than 90 per cent are given special attention with regard to improving their working conditions as the same continued to be very precarious without even minimum or equal wages, leave aside other legislative safeguards;
3. Making concerted efforts to ensure that the benefits of training and extension in agriculture and its allied activities of horticulture, small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries, etc. reach women in proportion to their numbers; and also issue of Joint Pattas for husband and wife under the Social Forestry and Joint Forest Management programmes;
4. Ensuring that the employers fulfil their legal obligations towards their women workers in extending child care facilities, maternity benefits, special leave, protection from occupational hazards, allowing formation of women workers' associations/unions, legal protection/aid etc.;
5. Re-training/upgrading the skills of women displaced from traditional sectors due to advancement of technology so that they can take up jobs in the new and expanding areas of employment and formulating appropriate policies and programmes to promote alternative opportunities for wage/self-employment in traditional sectors like khadi and village industries, handicrafts, handlooms, sericulture, small scale and cottage industries;
6. Initiating affirmative action to ensure at least 30 per cent of reservation for women in services in the Public Sector as their representation in 1999 was only 14.5 per cent, along with required provisions for upward mobility; and
7. Increasing access to credit for women either through the establishment of new micro-credit mechanisms or micro-financial institutions catering to women or strengthening existing arrangements in these areas along with an expansion of the limited coverage of RMK.

### **Gender Justice**

by eliminating all forms of gender discrimination and, thus, enable women to enjoy not only de-jure but also de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz. political, economic, social, civil, cultural etc. through

1. Complete eradication of female foeticide and female infanticide through effective enforcement of both the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 with most stringent measures of punishment so that a very harsh path is set for the illegal practitioners;
2. Adopting measures that take into account the reproductive rights of women to enable them to exercise their reproductive choices;
3. Working out strategies, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, to ensure extension of employment opportunities and thus, remove inequalities in employment – both in work and accessibility;
4. Initiating interventions at the macro-economic level to amend existing legislations to improve women's access to productive assets and resources • Ensuring that the value added by women in the Informal Sector as workers and producers is recognised through redefinition/re-interpretation of conventional concepts of work and preparation of Satellite and National Accounts;
5. Defining the Women's Component Plan (WCP) clearly and identifying the schemes/programmes/projects under each Ministry/Department which should be covered under WCP and ensuring the adoption of women-related mechanisms through which funds/benefits flow to women from these sectors;
6. Initiating action for enacting new women-specific legislations; amending the existing women-related legislation, if necessary, based on the review made and recommendations already available to ensure gender justice, besides, reviewing all the subordinate legislations to eliminate all gender discriminatory references;
7. Expediting action to legislate reservation of not less than 1/3 seats for women in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies and thus ensure women in proportion to their numbers reach decision-making bodies so that their voices are heard;
8. Arresting the ever-increasing violence against women and the Girl Child including the Adolescent girls on top priority with the strength and support of a well-planned Programme of Action prepared in consultation with all the concerned, especially the enforcement authorities; implementing effectively with the strength of the Law and Order Authorities both at the centre and state levels and assessing the situation;
9. Expediting standardisation of a Gender Development Index based on which the gender segregated data will be collected at national, state and district levels; compiled/collated and analysed to assess the progress made in improving the status of women at regular intervals with an ultimate objective of achieving equality on par with men; and

10. Initiating/accelerating the process of societal reorientation towards creating a Gender-Just Society.

While taking note of the efforts initiated during the Ninth Plan towards ensuring a gender-just/gender-sensitive budget, the Tenth Plan pledged to continue the process of dissecting the Government budget to establish its gender-differential impact and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. Recognizing the fact that as the process of Gender Budgeting has its own limitations in terms of being a post-facto effort to dissect/analyse and thus offset any undesirable gender-specific consequences of the previous budget, this cannot be an effective measure to ensure adequate flow of funds and benefits for women, the Tenth Plan suggested to initiate immediate action in tying up these two effective concepts of women's component plan (WCP) and Gender Budgeting to play a complementary role to each other, and thus ensure both preventive and post-facto action in enabling women to receive their rightful share from all the women-related general development sectors. The document admitted that more than the quantum or percentage of outlays, what is more important for empowering women is ensuring that the funds from various developmental sectors are effectively converged, properly utilised and monitored. This can be done through a systematic process of identifying the existing gaps in services and facilities being provided and ensuring that adequate resources reach to fill those gaps as these very gaps are standing as major obstacles in the process of empowering women. In this context, the Tenth Plan also took note of the over-riding priority given to the programmes of child development and the resultant intra-budgetary imbalances that exist within the budget of the nodal Department of Women and Child Development and suggested to rectify the same through a much more balanced distribution of resources between 'Empowerment of Women' and 'Development of Children', the two major responsibilities entrusted to it.

The Tenth plan goals of reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 1 per 1000 live births by 2012 and arresting the decline in the child sex ratio were reviewed in the mid Term appraisal of the Plan and it was found that both these goals remained unfulfilled. The midterm review also listed out the major areas of gender concern which continued to persist over the years – such as wide gender gaps in literacy and in wage rates, escalating violence against women and the rising incidence of female feticide and infanticide. Other important concerns expressed were the growing feminization of poverty and the exploitation of women in low paid, hazardous and insecure jobs in the unorganized sector and in the export processing or special economic zones. The need to address problems relating to trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation and domestic labour and prevention of child marriages was highlighted in the report.

The midterm Report also brought a number of focus areas, which needed to be addressed if the objective of women empowerment is to become a reality. Some of the suggestions included a review of laws affecting women and children; increasing women's participation in decision making and the political processes including passing of the women's Reservation Bill; and empowering women representatives of the PRI to take independent

decisions. The issue of displacement and its impact on women and children was also discussed with emphasis on the formulation of gender sensitive resettlement and rehabilitation policy.

The Review had also made an analysis of the existing schemes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and concluded that if significant impact has to be made in the field of economic empowerment of women, there is a need to combine schemes like STEP, Syamsiddha and Swawlamban into one substantial scheme for SHGs for women. The Review suggested that the self-help concept should be extended to cover mass-based organizations of women working to help each other, or for a shift from self-help groups to Mass Organisations. Special hostels with subsidized boarding and lodging facilities were felt necessary for adolescent girls to help retain them in school and discourage their early marriage.

Specific suggestions were made of the need to strengthen the women's component plan as it was felt that there were a number of Ministries and Departments, which had the potential to go beyond 30 per cent of funds under WCP programmes. It also called for assessing the gender impact of all programmes as the reality was that women still remained largely untouched by gender-just and gender-sensitive budgets.

#### *Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12)*

For the first time in the history of the planning process in India, a separate section on 'Gender Equity' was included in the Draft Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan. The Plan document admits that even though India has committed to meeting the millennium development goals (MDGs) and is a signatory to many international conventions, including Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, women and children in India continue to be victims of violence, neglect, and injustice. It promises to address these problems by looking at gender as a cross-cutting theme, by recognizing women's agency and the need for women's empowerment.

The vision of the Eleventh Five Year Plan is to end the multifaceted exclusions and discriminations faced by women and children; to ensure that every woman and child in the country is able to develop her full potential and share the benefits of economic growth and prosperity. The roadmap for success, as already laid in the National Policy on Women 2001 and the National Plan of Action for Children 2005, is drawn through a participatory approach that empowers women and children and makes them partners in their own development. The Eleventh Plan recognizes that women and children are not homogenous categories; they belong to diverse castes, classes, communities, economic groups, and are located within a range of geographic and development zones. Consequently, some groups are more vulnerable than others. Mapping and addressing the specific deprivations that arise from these multiple locations is essential for the success of planned interventions. Thus apart from the general programme interventions, special targeted interventions catering to the differential needs of these groups need to be undertaken during the Eleventh Plan.

In the Eleventh Plan, for the first time, women are recognized not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that interventions in favour of women must be multi-pronged and they must

- (i) provide women with basic entitlements,
- (ii) address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment,
- (iii) ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women (VAW) – physical, economic, social, psychological etc.,
- (iv) ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in Parliament and State assemblies, and
- (v) strengthen existing institutional mechanisms and create new ones for gender main-streaming and effective policy implementation.

The challenges for gender equity and the roadmap for the Eleventh Five Year Plan are clubbed under a five-fold agenda:

- (i) Ensuring economic empowerment,
- (ii) Engineering social empowerment,
- (iii) Enabling political empowerment,
- (iv) Effective implementation of women-related legislations, and
- (v) Creating institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming and strengthening delivery mechanisms.

It is expected that in the Eleventh Plan, institutional mechanisms will carry forward the process of gender mainstreaming and will be strengthened. National Commission for Women (NCW) and State Commissions for Women will be strengthened to enable them to effectively play their role as the nodal agencies for the protection of rights of women. Towards this end, efforts are on foot in the Eleventh Plan to suitably amend the NCW Act to give the Commission more powers both at the centre and in the States. In addition to this, more functional and financial autonomy and a statutory base will have to be ensured for these organizations to strengthen their legal status. This will not only ensure that these bodies remain non-partisan, it will also increase their credibility. It is also proposed to have a mechanism to periodically report to the National Development Council the progress on Women's Plans with respect to the National Policy for Empowerment of Women.

The Plan also considers to encourage Gender Budgeting and Gender Outcome assessment in all ministries/departments at Central and State levels. Gender Budgeting helps assess the gender differential impact of the budget and takes forward the translation of gender commitments to budgetary allocations. Gender outcome assessment of fund flows has now been made a mandatory part of the outcome budget prepared by every ministry/department as part of their budget documents. In 2005–06, this exercise covered 10 departments and the total magnitude of the Gender Budget (that is, women specific allocations) was recorded at 4.8% of total Union Government expenditure. In 2006–07, 24 departments of the Union Government were included and the magnitude of the Gender Budget was 3.8% of total budget estimates. It was found that schemes, which do not have a 100% women's component, also found a mention as women specific schemes. The Eleventh Plan therefore seeks to ensure that each ministry/department of both Centre and State should put in place a systematic and comprehensive monitoring and auditing mechanism for outcome assessment. In addition, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Ministry of Finance, and Planning Commission work together to facilitate national level gender outcome assessments through spatial mapping of gender gaps and resource gaps. They are to undertake gender audits of public expenditure, programmes, and policies, and ensure the collection of standardized, gender disaggregated data (including data disaggregated for SC/ST and minority women) at national, State, and district levels.

In the Eleventh Plan period, it is proposed to extend the existing system of gender-based planning to other ministries and departments and not confined only to those that have historically been perceived as 'women-related'. Ministries and departments, such as Education, Health and Family Welfare, Agriculture, Rural Development, Labour, Tribal Affairs, Social Justice and Empowerment, which have the potential to exceed the 30% WCP requirement, will be encouraged to administer more women related programmes. During the Eleventh Plan, efforts will be made to extend the concept of gender based plan component to PRIs and to the 29 subjects transferred to them under the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment. Recognizing that some women suffer greater deprivation and discrimination than others, the Eleventh Plan will refine the norms of WCP to prioritize the most vulnerable as beneficiaries, particularly SC, ST women, Muslim women, single women, differently abled, and HIV-positive women, among others.

The Eleventh Plan is committed to ensuring the participation of women in governance through the smooth passage of the much-delayed Women's Reservation Bill. There will be simultaneous training and inputs for women in the PRIs to enable them to influence gender sensitive local planning and implementation. Gender disaggregated data on the participation of women, especially SC/ST and minority women, in Parliament, State legislative assemblies, Council of Ministers, premier services, and in the overall government sector will be collected and made available in the public domain. The Plan will also make proactive efforts to provide competitive exam training and prioritize recruitment of women to All India Services especially IAS, IFS, and IPS.

The MWCD is expected to take the lead in creating and maintaining a comprehensive gender-disaggregated data base, for quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose

would be: (i) to base new initiatives on facts and figures, (ii) assess the gender impact of programmes, and (iii) assess the level of women's participation in planning and implementing programmes.

While strengthening SHG initiatives, policies and schemes, the Eleventh Plan seeks to simultaneously increase women's awareness, bargaining power, literacy, health, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills. It is suggested to prioritize training, capacity-building inputs, and the creation of backward-forward linkages, which are essential to generate sustainable livelihood opportunities. Given the scale of the phenomenon, there is a need to review the SHG interventions and ground realities to determine how SHGs may better serve the interests of poor women, and suggest changes required in overall SHG policy frameworks. The Eleventh Plan recognizes the importance of this issue and proposes a High Level Committee to conduct a review of SHG-related policies and programmes.

The Eleventh Plan proposes the following schemes for women development:

Swayamsiddha, an integrated scheme for women's empowerment through SHGs is the major scheme to be implemented by the MWCD in the Eleventh Plan. Swayamsidha Phase-II will be launched as a countrywide programme with larger coverage in States lagging behind in women development indices. The lessons learnt from Swayamsiddha Part 1 and Swashakti, especially regarding capacity building of poor women through SHGs, promoting thrift and credit activities amongst the women themselves, emphasizing on participatory approach towards poverty alleviation, and addressing common problems and issues through the SHGs, will be incorporated in the universalized Swayamsidha.

Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP), a scheme for skill training of women, is set to be revamped during the Eleventh Plan based on evaluation results (under way) and will be integrated with Swayamsidha to ensure adequate outlay for countrywide implementation. The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh will also be integrated with STEP and Swayamsidha for credit linkages, but will be reviewed in the Eleventh Plan period before considering any further expansion.

A separate Women Empowerment and Livelihood Project assisted by United Nations' International Fund for Agricultural Development will be implemented during the Eleventh Plan in four districts of UP and two districts of Bihar.

Various social empowerment schemes for women will be implemented during the Eleventh Plan. Condensed courses of education will be run to facilitate skill-development and vocational training of adult girls and women who could not join mainstream education system or were forced to dropout from formal schools. This will improve their social and economic status by making them employable. The Ministry will use mass media to run an Awareness Generation Project on issues relating to the status, rights, and problems of women. Through this project it will also try to ensure a balanced portrayal of women in newspapers, media channels, serials, films, etc.

The most important programme for women to be run by the MWCD during the

Eleventh Plan will be the provision of Maternity Benefits. The ICDS scheme will have a component of conditional maternity benefits under which pregnant and lactating mothers will be entitled to cash incentives for three months before birth and three months after the birth of the child. This will encourage and enable mothers to avoid physically stressful activities, meet medical and nutrition supplementation expenses during the last trimester, and spend time with the child after birth. The benefits under the scheme will be conditional to the mother being registered with the Anganwadi, undergoing regular health check up and immunization.

The MWCD will continue to run its earlier schemes offering support services. Under a revised Working Women's Hostel scheme, financial assistance will be provided to NGOs, co-operative bodies, and other agencies for construction/renting of buildings for hostels to provide safe and affordable accommodations to working women. The scheme of Swadhar homes for destitute women and women in difficult circumstance will continue, albeit with modifications. A women's helpline foundation will also be set up. Under the Short-Stay Home Scheme, suitable accommodation with basic amenities and services like counselling, legal aid, medical facilities, vocational training, and rehabilitation will be provided for women and girls who are victims of marital conflict, crime, or homelessness.

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) will continue financing NGOs for implementation of various women and child-related schemes. But during the Plan, all the existing schemes of the CSWB will be reviewed and restructured in the light of current requirements. If necessary, some of them will also be merged with schemes of WCD.

#### **4. A Critique – In lieu of Conclusion**

It should however be noted that the Plan document does not give enough focus on women's empowerment issues in the country. The strategy for women is confined to three areas – violence against women, economic empowerment and women's health. There has been no attempt to understand that empowerment of women has to be visualized as a holistic integrated approach and not in a piecemeal manner or as water tight compartments. More often than not, the lines dividing social, economic or political areas are highly diffused and blurred with crisscrossing intersections.

Over the years there have been efforts made to socially, economically and politically empower women but as a result of the lack of synergy or coordination between these activities, the outcomes could never be completely satisfactory. For example the increasing induction of women representatives into the PRIs should have meant automatic improvement in the lives of rural women, but if it has not happened, it is because the elected women were not educated or literate or even made aware of their rights. Also there are many groups of women who on account of tradition, culture, ethnic, social or religious background are more vulnerable compared to the women in the mainstream sector. These groups need to be specially focused on.

It is imperative that an integrated policy and strategy be formulated that addresses economic, social, and political empowerment simultaneously and holistically along with the

requisite programmes and schemes. Once such a comprehensive policy and programs flowing from it are put in place, it will be possible to enable an all round development of women, which will usher in true empowerment. It is on this plank of the philosophy of empowerment that the Eleventh plan approach to women should have been based. An underlying thread that will form the essence of empowerment philosophy is 'gender equality and equity' and 'elimination of gender discrimination' – essential ingredients that must be inherent in the thrust areas and also incorporated as an integral part not only in all programs and schemes for women, but also in the delivery mechanism and outreach services to the beneficiary.

Gender equality, is a constituent of development as well as an instrument of development. No country can be deemed developed if half its population is severely disadvantaged in terms of basic needs, livelihood options, access to knowledge, and political voice. It is an instrument of development because without gender equality other goals of development will also be difficult to achieve, namely the goals of poverty alleviation, economic growth, environmental sustainability etc. A natural corollary of ensuring gender equality is the elimination of gender discrimination. Inequalities between girls and boys in access to schooling or adequate health care prove a very serious disadvantage to women and girls and limit their capacity to participate in the benefits of development.

As mentioned earlier, the elimination of gender based discriminations is one of the fundamentals of the constitutional edifice of India. In fact the Constitution empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative discriminations and deprivations which women face. Further as explained earlier, the four basic provisions of the Constitution viz. the Fundamental Rights relating to the provisions on equal rights and opportunities of men and women in political, economic and social spheres, the prohibition of discrimination on ground of religion, race, caste, sex etc., the provision enabling the State to take affirmative action in favour of women and the equality of opportunities in public employment for men and women are themselves justiciable claims and can be redressed through the writ jurisdiction of the High Courts and the Supreme Court of India.

The right of equality is a fundamental one. However, the institutional forces arraigned against it are equally powerful and exert control and shape people's mindsets. Factors like caste, class, community, religion, locality, family, occupation all combine to affect women and men alike, making them accept gender inequality as something given without the need for questioning.

While legislative and judicial activism have constituted the mainstay of India's efforts to eliminate discriminatory behaviour, stereotyped roles and inequality of status, they can never be adequate. Laws alone or judicial activism cannot bring about enduring changes in an ancient social fabric such as India's. The socialization process is too deep and too entrenched to be tackled through legislation alone. Very often, enforcement agencies and institutions remain steeped in gender biases. Further, the biases that restrict women's mobility and access to resources are deep rooted in economic and social interests and unequal power relationships. Patriarchal controls redefine and re-assert themselves cutting across barriers of caste and community threatening the realization of the dreams of our Constitution of a gender-just society, free from exploitation. It is, therefore,

necessary to change people's mindsets and bring about a societal re-orientation in all sectors and at all levels of oppression and subordination. This realization itself owes to the fact that women in India have become a 'revolutionary force'. They are pouring into every forum, storming every position, demanding their right to be heard and decide agendas.

In the Indian context, the role of the family is crucial. While the strength of the family, respect for elders and strong family values are abiding features of Indian society across religions, cultures, languages and castes, the family is also very often the site for discrimination and subordination. It is here that violence against girls and women reach alarming proportions. Female foeticide, infanticide, dowry violence and torture, remain largely invisible and often go unpunished in spite of Constitutional guarantees and the long arm of the law.

Several initiatives have been taken up by the Government and non-government sector as part of the endeavour to bring about a change in mindsets and sensitise males and females. Multi media campaigns have been mounted to sensitise people in addition to print and electronic media, songs, slogans and street plays.

Innovative strategies of community mobilization are being increasingly used in the education sphere. The National Literacy Mission through the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) has played a key role in raising awareness in issues of gender equity as have the Women's Development Programme, "Mahila Samakhya" and several other programmes. The basic end-objective has been to enable women to become movers, creators and producers of social transformation and not remain mere passive recipients and consumers of given usages.

Judicial activism by the Supreme Court of India through public interest litigation and occasional efforts by India's free media have also emerged as major instruments for bringing about changes in societal attitudes. It should also be noted that a number of media advocacy groups have come up largely in the non-governmental sphere to guard against negative portrayal and promote positive portrayal of women and girl children, particularly in the electronic media.

One of the core mandates of the National Machinery has been to advocate change of attitudes and values of the entire governmental machinery from within and of society at large. The two year period, preceding the Beijing Conference, was successfully utilized by the Government to launch a nationwide mobilization and consultation process on various aspects of women's status and situation along with hundreds of NGOs, State Governments, Parliamentarians and the women's movement. The changes in perceptions of women and the highlighting and articulation of women's issues and voices throughout the country during these two years was unmatched in the history of the nation. In terms of propounding empowerment-related issues for women and ensuring that they remain in focus, the run-up to Beijing has played a vital role in the country. Consultations are not new: they were taken up in the 1970s and 1980s also – the new phenomenon was the appearance of a large number of grass root groups of poor women not just intermediaries. This change owes much to the stepped up strategy of investment and

such groups through the anti poverty programmes, to the total literacy campaigns and to the mobilization in response to the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution (reserving 1/3 seats for women in local government bodies). The women had come not as individuals but as representative groups different from the family-household, kinship-community networks which have defined their identity so far. The other unique feature of this process was the fact that peasant women's voices and concerns dominated these consultations for the first time. Collective investment has perhaps helped to initiate a process of erosion of the two pillars of patriarchy: the culture of silence and social invisibility. Recent fundamentalist assertions of a specific view of culture by both religious and ethnic groups have however posed new threats to gender. The spread of intellectual beliefs (post modernism etc.) which reject universal values and propagate cultural specificity have enrolled many from elites who earlier supported gender equality reinforcing such threats.

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