

Changing nature of gender relations in india essay sample

[Countries](#), [India](#)



Introduction:

Household – The root source for gender relations One of the most important institutions in the lives of people is the household. Poverty interventions directly or indirectly affect and are affected by the household and gender relations, and hence there lies the importance of exploring intra-household gender dynamics. The household is a basic unit as well as a primary place of society in which individuals confront and reproduce societal norms, values, power, and privilege and where individuals both cooperate and compete for resources. Gender norms expressed within the household are reinforced and reflected in larger institutions of society. “ Gender relations are not confined to the domestic arena — although households constitute an important institutional site on which not only gender relations are played out — but are made, remade and contested in a range of institutional arenas” (Kabeer 1997). In other words, this is not simply a story of the household and its members, but about the shaping of gender identities by larger institutions, and the ongoing participation of family members in creating new gender norms.

Traditional Gender Norms

A norm is a shared expectation of behaviour that expresses what is considered culturally desirable and appropriate, while a role is a set of norms attached to a social position (Marshall 1994). Social norms are reinforced through popular culture, radio, television, traditional art forms, proverbs and stories, customs, laws, and everyday practice. Akerlof and Kranton (1999) connect the psychology and sociology of identity to economic behaviour. “

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Stereotypical characteristics of men are competitive, acquisitive, autonomous, independent, confrontational, concerned about private goods. Parallel stereotypes of women are cooperative, nurturing, caring, connecting, group-oriented, concerned about public goods.” Thus, gender identity even plays a role in shaping economic outcomes. Common proverbs such as, “When a girl is born, the karma must be bad” (Nepal), and in India “A good girl suffers in silence” indicate that cultural norms are deeply embedded and understood as “facts.” Women’s “inferiority” is used to justify discrimination and abuse in the household and in society at large and power inequity is reflected and reinforced by traditional and modern laws and institutional practices.

A woman’s extra-household bargaining power with legal authorities, society, and the market impacts her intra-household bargaining power. In country after country, women explained that their right to inheritance was either non-existent or limited. When women did have inheritance rights and asserted them, they risked social ostracism from the very same kin networks in which they base their daily survival. The ability of men and their families to throw women out of their married homes with or without a final divorce, without even their own jewellery, reflects a social inequality of power. The threat of divorce is perhaps an even more potent deterrent to women’s self-assertion. In North India, the idea that “A woman leaves her father’s home in a wedding palanquin and only returns in a coffin” is staple fare for many a Bollywood film. While many women organize, take action, and protest, in the

studies analyzed, poor women reported using individual exit strategies, becoming silent, or using indirect ways of asserting themselves.

Women also try to improve their lives by using indirect or discreet, traditionally and culturally appropriate means to negotiate more authority in the household. Social norms are remarkably tenacious. Even in the face of changing gender roles, rigid social norms ground men and women in particular identities and expectations. These norms constitute a formidable barrier to survival of individuals, households, and communities. Economic Disruption and Gender Anxiety Linkage The household is an institution that is strained and in flux. Vast economic, social, and political restructuring has not—with few exceptions—translated into increased economic opportunities for the poor.

Under increasing economic pressure, men in many parts of the world have lost their traditional occupations and jobs, and women have been forced to take on additional income earning tasks while continuing their domestic tasks. These changes have touched core values about gender identity, gender power, and gender relations within poor households, and anxiety about what is a “good woman” or a “good man” seems pervasive.

Values and relations are being

broken, tested, contested, and renegotiated in silence, pain, and violence.

What is striking is that despite widespread changes in gender roles, traditional gender norms have shown remarkable tenacity, leaving families struggling to meet the often contradictory demands. Over and over again,

across countries and in India, women were identified as “ homemakers,” the keepers of the family, responsible for the well-being of their children and husbands. Women often feel powerless and yet are willing to undertake considerable risk in order to provide for their children. There exists the entrenched nature of men’s identities as ‘ breadwinners and decision-makers’ even as these roles are undermined and eroded by changing social and economic environments. These socially defined roles of men and women are not only unattainable; they sometimes stand in stark contradiction with reality. This is what creates the stress and helplessness.

Households are adapting to acute and long term stress in gender-specific ways: men often seem to react with defeat while women react by “ swallowing their pride” and taking desperate action. When men are unemployed or underemployed, women enter low income, low-status jobs in order to feed their families. As a consequence of their inability to contribute adequately to the family income, men may start feeling “ redundant” and burdensome to households; they experience disorienting challenges to their perceptions of themselves as providers and heads of families, often resulting in anger and frustration. Women, on the other hand, continue to care for their families and gain a shaky new confidence, though their connections to employment remain tenuous.

The following table is a reflection of the link between economic disruption and gender anxiety. The pressures of poverty are experienced very differently by men and women. Men have experienced a threat to their social status, self respect, and confidence in their economic role as providers for

their family, through the loss of their property and through increased dependence on the informal earnings of their wives to meet basic household needs. Many instances were cited of men who had left the community and deserted their families because of debt they could not repay, or simply because they were unable to provide for their wives and children. What is the outcome for households of shifting gender identities? Some households cope by cooperating and dealing with these gender shifts. For other families, it ends in violence, breakup, or divorce. Roots of Gender Inequality: Women and their status in family and condition in society In Indian society family system is still strong.

Though the concept like 'live in relationship' is accepted by some youngsters in cities, the traditional concept of marriage is deep rooted. The family is most important factor in political socialization. Woman is backbone of Indian family. All customs and traditions are transferred by her to the next generation. But still, status of woman is subordinate. Women empowerment is necessary for India as women are backbone of family system. The process of socialization is accelerated by family and women plays important role in family. In rural areas the lack of equality is supposed to be the normal way of life. Even today, education which is given to the girl child is to become good 'housewife in future', than to become a 'good citizen'. In Indian family a woman who scarifies most is respected the most.

To fight for own rights is not encouraged. Thus cultural norms make impact on family system. The family is a strong factor in the process of Political Socialization. For the women empowerment role of modern families are to be

reviewed. The gender equality should be introduced in the family first. The empowerment of woman should start from family. The basic needs like education, health, employment and participation in decision making must be encouraged in family first. The traditional attitude of men must be changed. The women's status must be equal to the men. From multiple perspectives, women find themselves in subordinate positions to men. In most societies, women are socially, culturally, and economically dependent on men. Violence against women is an extreme expression of male dominance and one of the most intractable violations of women's human rights.

The women population today constitutes nearly half of country's population. But at national level women's literacy is 53. 7% while men's is 75. 3%. Rural Literacy rate of males is 70. 7% and females is only 46%. Urban literacy rate of males is 86. 3% and females is 72. 9% as per census of 2001. Thus there is gap between literacy rate of males and female despite promise of equality provided by constitution in India. Basically, secondary status of women in society is one of the reasons. To strengthen democracy, women empowerment is necessary. In rural area a girls are still deprived from education. The lack of education leads to exploitation in various fields. The women empowerment begins with from literacy and education. National Family Health Survey (NFHS)(2005-06) presents some shocking results.

According to NFHS-3 (2005-06) women in the age bracket of 20-24 married by age 18 constitute 47. 4%. The urban woman 29. 3% and rural women 56. 2%. The practice of marriage of girls below the age of 18 is still continuing, though various efforts for awareness regarding this matter are being made.

The survey showed that the women in the age bracket of 15-19 who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey were 16%. In urban they were 8.7% and in rural area 19.1%. The woman's health is an important issue. Mothers who had at least three antenatal care visits for their last birth were total 50.7%. In urban area it is 73.8% and rural area 42.8%. Birth assisted by doctors/nurse/LHV/ANW/Other health personnel were total 48.8%, urban 75.3% and rural 39.9% only. The family often neglect the health care of women. The pregnant women between ages 15-49 who are anaemic totals 57.9%, urban 54.6% and rural 59.0% which is shocking.

Women and Health

The average nutritional intake of women is 1400 calories daily. The necessary requirement is approximately 2200 calories. 38% of all HIV positive people in India are women yet only 25% of beds in AIDS Care Centres in India are occupied by them. 92% of women in India suffer from gynaecological problems. 300 women die every day due to childbirth and pregnancy related causes.

Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years)

The child sex ratio has dropped from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 927 females per 1000 males in 2001, The United Nations Children's Fund, estimated that upto 50 million girls and women are 'missing' from India's population because of termination of the female foetus or high mortality of the girl child due to lack of proper care.

Women as Workers

Female share of non-agricultural wage employment is only 17%.

Participation of women in the workforce is only 13.9% in the urban sector and 29.9% in the rural sector. Women's wage rates are, on an average only 75% of men's wage rates and constitute only 25% of the family income.

In no Indian State do women and men earn equal wages in agriculture.

Women occupy only 9% of parliamentary seats, less than 4% seats in High Courts and Supreme Court, less than 3% administrators and managers are women.

Violence and Crime against Women

The persistence of violence against women across many societies suggests that it is not merely a characteristic of particular individuals but is, at a deeper level, related to social structures that maintain unequal socioeconomic relations between men and women. At the core of gender based violence are the unequal power relations that limit women's choices and reinforce dependency on men. The social, political, and economic dependence of women on men provides a structure wherein men can perpetuate violence against women. Despite the widespread nature of violence, it appears to be a socially and politically "untouchable" subject even by state agencies and international institutions. The following examples in Indian context can be helpful in understanding the situation in this regard.

Female Foeticide

Female foeticide in India increased by 49. 2% between 1999-2000. (Source: NCRB ‘ Crime in India, 1999-2000’)

According to NCRB ‘ Crime in India, 2011’ the following crimes were committed against women in India.

Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances are equal. The emphasis on gender equality and women’s empowerment does not presume a particular model of gender equality for all societies and cultures, but reflects a concern that women and men have equal opportunities to make choices about what gender equality means and work in partnership to achieve it. Because of current disparities, equal treatment of women and men is insufficient as a strategy for gender equality. Equal treatment in the context of inequalities can mean the perpetuation of disparities. Achieving gender equality will require changes in institutional practices and social

relations through which disparities are reinforced and sustained. Equality between women and men should be promoted in ways that are appropriate to each particular context. This begins with an understanding of the current status of women and men, their relations to each other and the interconnections between gender and other factors. Gender analysis, as an essential part of a socio-economic analysis, offers useful questions and methods. These can be used to understand the social relations between men

and women and the interconnection of gender with other social relationships, such as those defined by race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability and/or other status.

The world's resources are very unevenly distributed, not only between countries, but also between men and women within countries. While it is estimated that women perform two-thirds of the world's work, they only earn one tenth of the income, and own less than one per cent of the world's property. In many cases, women's rights and access to land, credit and education, for instance, are limited not only due to legal discrimination, but because more subtle barriers (such as their work load, mobility and low bargaining position at household and community level) prevent them from taking advantage of their legal rights. Either by law or by custom, women in many countries still lack rights to:

- Own land and to inherit property
 - Obtain access to credit
 - Attend and stay in school
 - Earn income and move up in their work which is free from job discrimination
 - Have access to services that meet their sexual and reproductive health needs
- The concept of Gender Equity holds its relevance in this regard and need to be discussed. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and

men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

A step forward: Women's Empowerment

Women empowerment means strengthening the role of women in every field. The women should be given adequate opportunities to develop themselves. ' Women are supposed to be subordinate to man in societies of all countries of the world. Empowerment of women aims at challenging their subordination and subjugation.' There is vast scope for women empowerment. To strengthen democracy, the people must be capable and educated. Even today in day to day life ' politics' is subordinate subject for women. Their priorities revolve around family and child rearing. But the woman has to play more important role as a citizen too. The training to become responsible citizen is to be given to all, especially to women. In democracy the ' civic sense' matters a lot. Keeping the public places clean and saving electricity as well as obeying traffic rule even in absence of traffic police are some examples of ' civic sense.' It is discipline in citizen which strengthens the Democratic System.

There is a need of women's political participation in political decision making . In rural area women rarely get this opportunity. ' Taken as a separate class, women may have to be treated as the largest minority in society. Because of their engagement in the house-hold, they do not avail of the opportunity of participating freely in their political life'. The financial independence, self-development, backing of family are important factors for

empowerment of women. Empowerment of women is the key factor in strengthening of democracy. Today democracy is accepted as the best system in the world. It gives equal status to all citizens. Liberty, Equality and justice are the basic principles of it. But to understand meaning and limitations of this concept the citizen should be educated. The rights and duties are to be accepted as two sides of one coin by citizen. Not the literacy but education is to be given to citizen, especially to the women.

‘ With the higher education one is more likely to believe in democratic values and support democratic practices.’ But as per the survey of NFHS-3(2005-6) the percentage of women who participate in household decision is very low. Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions are total 36. 7%. In urban area it is 45% and in rural area it is 33% only. Thus participation in household decision making is already less and there is expectation from them to participate in political decision making. There is a nexus of a few key, overlapping terms that are most often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control, and power. Most often these are referring to women’s ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control over one’s own life and over resources is often stressed. Also appearing frequently in definitions of empowerment is an element related to the concept of human agency — self-efficacy.

Drawing mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives, many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions, or “ inner transformation,” is essential to the formulation of choices. That is, women

should be able to define self interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able, but entitled to make choices (A. Sen 1999; G. Sen 1993, Kabeer 2001; Rowlands 1995; Nussbaum 2000; Chen 1992). Kabeer (2001) goes a step further and describes this process in terms of “ thinking outside the system” and challenging the status quo. Naila Kabeer (2001) offers a useful definition of empowerment that can be applied across the range of contexts that development assistance is concerned with: “ The expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” Although brief, this definition is specific enough to distinguish it from the general concept of “ power,” as exercised by dominant individuals or groups.

Kabeer’s definition is especially attractive because it contains two elements which help distinguish empowerment from other closely related concepts (as discussed further below): 1) the idea of process, or change from a condition of disempowerment, and 2) that of human agency and choice, which she qualifies by saying that empowerment implies “ choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives” and without “ punishingly high costs”. According to Kabeer, women’s empowerment is the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability.

This ability to exercise choices incorporates three inter-related dimensions: resources which include access to and future claims to both material and social resources; agency which includes the process of decision-making, negotiation, deception and manipulation; and achievements that are the

well-being outcomes. Sifting Through Terminology One reason why the degree of consensus on the conceptualization of empowerment is not readily apparent in the literature is because of the variation in terminology used to encompass it. A range of terms, concepts and data may be relevant for assessing “ empowerment”; for example, various studies have aimed at measuring women’s “ autonomy” , “ agency,” “ status”, “ women’s land rights” , “ domestic economic power”, “ bargaining power”, “ power”, “ patriarchy”, “ gender equality”, or “ gender discrimination”. Often there is no clear demarcation between these terms. Mason (1998) and Smith (2000), for example, treat empowerment, autonomy, and gender stratification interchangeably. Similarly, Jejeebhoy (2000) considers autonomy and empowerment as more or less equal terms, and defines both in terms of women “ gaining control of their own lives vis-a-vis family, community, society, markets.”

In contrast, other authors have explicitly argued that autonomy is not equivalent to empowerment, stressing that autonomy implies independence whereas empowerment may well be achieved through interdependence (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996; Kabeer 1998). Early studies of “ women’s status” often covered several aspects of empowerment without explicitly labeling it as such. One of the earliest empirical studies in this area, for example, used the more general term “ women’s status” but located a nexus of gender-related power differentials in the household, noting importance of the family unit in understanding the operation of gender in a society (Acharya and Bennett 1981). Acharya and

Bennett also highlight the links between women's economic roles and their control over resources and life options.

In this context, it must be noted that the terms “ women's empowerment”, “ gender equality” and “ gender equity” are separate in their absolute connotations, but closely related concepts. The policy research report by the World Bank (2001a) employs the term “ gender equality”, which is defined in terms of equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process). Gender equality implies “ equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests, and requiring a redistribution of power and resources.”

Gender equity “ recognizes that women and men have different needs, preferences, and interests and that equality of outcomes may necessitate different treatment of men and women” (Reeves and Baden 2000: 10).

Notwithstanding the similarities in the concepts underlying many of these terms, we think that the concept of empowerment can be distinguished from others based on its unique definitional elements. As discussed above, the first essential element of empowerment is that it is a process (Kabeer 2001; Chen 1992; Rowlands 1995, Oxaal and Baden 1997). None of the other concepts explicitly encompasses a progression from one state (gender inequality) to another (gender equality).

Much of the emphasis on empowerment as a process is found in the conceptual literature, but this understanding is also beginning to be incorporated into the frameworks of empirical studies. For example, even as Jejeebhoy (2000) considers autonomy and empowerment to be fairly similar, she argues that the former is a static state—and thus measurable by most available indicators—while the latter is change over time, and not so easily measurable. The second element of empowerment that distinguishes it from other concepts is agency—in other words, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being described or measured (G. Sen 1993; Mehra 1997). Thus, hypothetically there could be an improvement in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening processes involved women as agents of that change rather than merely as its recipients, we would not consider it empowerment.

However desirable, it would merely be an improvement in outcomes from one point in time to another. The importance of agency in the discourse on empowerment emerges from “bottom up” rather than “top down” approaches toward development (Oxaal and Baden 1997; Rowlands 1995; Narayan et al. 2000a & 2000b). At the institutional and aggregate levels, it emphasizes the importance of participation and “social inclusion” (Friedmann 1992; Chambers 1997; Narayan et al. 2000a & 2000b) At the micro level, it is embedded in the idea of self-efficacy and the significance of the realization by individual women that they can be the agents of change in their own lives.

The Process of Empowerment There are various attempts in the literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of empowerment through breaking the process down into key components. The specific components tend to differ depending on the orientation and agenda of the writer. But there is greater consensus than expected. Kabeer's (2001) understanding of "choice" comprises three inter-related components: "resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made, and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices." The World Bank's report on "Engendering Development," (2001a) defines rights, resources, and voice as the three critical components of gender equality. Chen (1992) describes "resources, perceptions, relationships, and power," as the main components of empowerment, and Batliwala (1994), characterizes empowerment as "control over resources and ideology." UNICEF uses the Women's Empowerment Framework constructed by Sara Longwe, which encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation, and control (UNICEF 1994).

Resources and agency (in various forms and by various names, e. g., control, awareness, voice, power), are the two most common components of empowerment emphasized in the literature we reviewed. In many discussions, however, resources are treated not as empowerment per se, but as catalysts for empowerment or conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur. In the context of policy and evaluation, it may be more useful to think of resources as "enabling factors"; that is, as potentially critical

inputs to foster an empowerment process, rather than as part of empowerment itself. And, in fact, many of the variables that have traditionally been used as “proxies” for empowerment, such as education and employment, might be better described as “enabling factors” or “sources” of empowerment” (Kishor 2000a). As our review of measurement issues and empirical evidence illustrates below, although many empirical studies have used variables such as education and employment as proxies for empowerment, there is a growing understanding that this equation is problematic (Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996; Malhotra and Mather 1997; Kishor 1995; Mason 1998).

The second component, agency, is at the heart of many conceptualizations of empowerment. Human agency is a central concept in A. Sen’s (1999) characterization of development as the process of removing various types of “unfreedoms” that constrain individual choice and agency. Kabeer’s (2001) essay on women’s empowerment draws on Sen’s understanding of agency as well as his conceptualization of the links between individual agency with public action. Among the various concepts and terms we encountered in the literature on empowerment, “agency” probably comes closest to capturing what the majority of writers are referring to. It encompasses the ability to formulate strategic choices, and to control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes. Some characterizations of empowerment have included an additional component, which Kabeer refers to as “achievements” and Longwe as “welfare.” And, in international policy processes, women’s empowerment is implicitly equated with specific (usually

national level) achievements such as political participation, legal reform, and economic security.

In the context of evaluation, we would argue that achievements are best treated as outcomes of empowerment, not as empowerment per se (just as resources may be more usefully construed as enabling factors or catalysts for empowerment). Granted, one might question whether agency really amounts to empowerment if there is no meaningful result in terms of women's status, strategic position or welfare. But whether any empowerment indicator or form of agency (such as exercising control over decisions or resources) really amounts to empowerment in a particular context will always be an empirical question. As we note elsewhere, it may be possible to identify empowerment indicators that can be applied in a wide variety of contexts, but there will always be situations in which a particular indicator does not signify empowerment.

This does not mean that the development of empowerment indicators is a futile task, only that the complexities of measuring empowerment must be taken into account in developing conceptual frames and research designs. In identifying agency as the essence of women's empowerment, it is not being suggested that all improvements in women's position must be brought about through the actions of women themselves or that empowering themselves is the responsibility of individual women. There is ample justification for governments and multilaterals to promote policies that strengthen gender equality through various means, including legal and political reform, and interventions to give women (and other socially excluded groups) greater

access to resources (e. g. World Bank 2001a). National and international institutions have the responsibility for ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged populations socially, economically, and politically. The question is whether it is useful to describe all actions taken toward that end as “ empowerment”, and we would suggest that it is not.

The major reason for the emphasis on agency as the defining criterion is because of the many examples in the literature of cases in which giving women’s access to resources does not lead to their greater control over resources, where changes in legal statutes have little influence on practice, and where female political leaders do not necessarily work to promote women’s interests. Thus while resources—economic, social and political—are often critical in ensuring that women are empowered, they are not always sufficient. Without women’s individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment. Having argued that “ agency” should be treated as the essence of empowerment, and resources and achievements as enabling conditions and outcomes, respectively, another caveat is necessary. While distinctions such as those between “ resources, agency and achievements” (Kabeer 2001) or “ sources versus evidence” of empowerment seem clear at the conceptual level, it is not always easy to completely separate them in developing empowerment indicators.

And too, a given variable may function as an indicator of women’s access to resources (or an enabling factor) in one context, of women’s agency in another, and may represent an achievement in still other contexts. For

example, microcredit programs and employment opportunities are often seen as resources for women's empowerment. But if a woman seeks to gain access to microcredit, or to get a job, then getting the job or joining the credit program might be best characterized as a manifestation of women's agency, and the benefits she draws as a result—income, discretionary spending, healthcare, etc—as achievements. Women's economic contribution is treated as an enabling factor and used to predict other outcomes such as control over important decisions and even the outcomes of decisions such as family size or contraceptive use.

But in other contexts women's economic contribution would be more accurately described as a form of agency or, again even an achievement. Similarly, assets owned could function as sources of empowerment, but they could also constitute evidence that empowerment had been achieved. The meaning of any empowerment indicator will always depend on its inter-relationships with other variables. Empowerment is a dynamic process. Separating the process into components (such as enabling factors, agency and outcomes) may be useful in identifying policy interventions to support empowerment, and for evaluating the impact of such interventions, but it is important to realize that a framework for research or evaluation of a specific policy or intervention will refer to only one phase of the process and which phase it refers to will depend on the context, the interventions being assessed, and the outcomes of interest.

Women's Empowerment in Contemporary India Contemporary Indian society has been exposed to the broad processes of social transformation,

agricultural modernization and economic development, urbanization and globalization. However, these processes have generated regional imbalances, sharpened class inequalities and augmented the gender disparities. Hence, women have become critical symbols of these growing imbalances. All these have affected adversely the various aspects of women's empowerment in the contemporary Indian society. The family and women's work is not enough to say that any society consists of men and women. It is equally important to look at how the two groups of people interact, as well as at the role and exceptions each group has of the other. Such roles and exceptions are a product of the stereotypes of each gender. By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with a gender.

Thus, the first idea on gender role differences, which a child acquires, is that of women of one's family marrying and leaving their homes to leave with different groups of people. Secondly, men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision making and are far more visible and audible than their wives. Third, most of the tasks within the home are done by the mother, grand mother, sisters and so on. At meal times they carry food to the fields for the men. All these tasks, which consume time and energy, are not counted as work and there is no payment involved. In western countries, women's groups, politicians and other concerned individuals have been arguing for payment for house work and childcare. In India, the question of payment for household jobs has not really been an important issue or demand.

As we shall see, there are many other issues, which require urgent attention. At the same time, it is important for us to remember that non-payment should not also mean non- recognition. The fact that women are expected to perform all these tasks as a part of their conventional roles and on special merit is awarded to them for these tiring and tiresome jobs. There are certain commonly used dimensions of empowerment and potential operationalization in the household, community and other broader arenas of life. The expression by the following chart will not only cover several aspects of analysis such as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological but at the same time will be helpful in understanding the changed trends in women empowerment. Commonly used dimensions of empowerment and potential operationalization in the household, community, and broader arenas

Dimension

Household

Community

Broader Arenas

Economic

Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets Women's representation in high paying jobs; women CEO's; Representation of

women's economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets Socio-Cultural

Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions

Familial/

Interpersonal

Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e. g. later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services

Legal

Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights

Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations

Political

Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups

Psychological

Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being

Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion All the above stated commonly used dimensions of empowerment and potential operationalization in the household, community, and broader arenas can be best practiced when they are supported by the Government. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in 2001 acts as a landmark initiative in this regard.

Social Participation through

Government Intervention

Government's efforts for women empowerment-

Government of India is taking a lot of efforts to establish gender equality and justice. National commission for women is also playing an important role.

The National commission for women has celebrated centenary of International Women Day, on 11th March 2011. National commission for women is apex national level organization of India with the mandate of protecting and promoting the interest of women. The theme of centenary celebration of National commission for women was 'access to justice'. The government is constantly keeping watch on crimes against the women. In urban as well as in rural area women are facing various types of crimes. Government is trying to control them. Another important issue is safety of domestic women workers.

The proposed bill named

'The Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act' is quite promising. In urban area the domestic help is common need as many women are working. The issue of exploitation of women and children domestic workers is most challenging. The condition of domestic helps many a times is miserable. It is similar to 'Slavery In Modern Age'. There is lack of proper food, health and sleeping conditions. Occasionally there is complete cut off from their family members. The cases of sexual exploitations are suppressed

within homes. This proposed bill to protect the dignity of domestic workers will play an important role. Basically, Government is working for welfare of weaker sections of society. There are schemes and proposed schemes for empowerment of women. The schemes like SABLA, SWAYAMSIDHA and SWADHAR are very good signs in comprehensive approach towards women empowerment.

The government's efforts should reach to the deprived woman in grassroots. The implementing agency should accept humanitarian attitude. There is need for awareness in women. To change subordinate status of women inside and outside of the family is the real challenge. There is a hope of capable Panchayati Raj . The political participation of women is key factor in grassroots development. There are various opportunities for women at Panchayati Raj. But in rural area attitude of society should be positive regarding woman leadership. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments are significant regarding political participation of women at grassroots level. The empowerment of women should not be limited at economical, social, political and educational development. It should include emotional strength in women in today's society. The right attitude of men is also important in women empowerment. The process of empowerment should start from home.

Women's Reservations

The reservations for women is one of the efforts to give opportunity to them to participate in active politics. The 73rd and 74th amendment has

introduced 33% reservations for women in Local Self-Government in 1993. It was an important landmark in the history of women empowerment. The women started to participate in the political decision-making process. It was a great opportunity for the women at the grassroots level to enter active politics. The Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill on 9th March 2010. It was the 108th amendment. It has not yet been passed in the Lok Sabha.

According

to the bill, 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be reserved for women. The Government of Maharashtra has announced 50% reservations in Panchayat Raj for women. These decisions are really landmarks in the process of strengthening democracy. In a democratic system, every section of society must get proper representation. Women can understand local problems very well. They constitute nearly half of the population of the country. They must be given adequate representation in the political decision-making process. Reservations can prove to be great platforms for women to enter mainstream politics. This system will surely contribute to women empowerment.

National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women (2001): The New Hope Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, 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. Women's role in decision making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments(1992) to the Indian Constitution

have served as a major break through towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures. This Amendment provided for reservation of one third of seats for women at the level of local governance in urban areas. There is also a one-third reservation

for women for posts of chairpersons of these local bodies. This amendment has initiated a powerful strategy of affirmative action for providing the structural framework for women's participation in political decision-making and provided an opportunity to bring women to be forefront and centre of city development and develop new grass-root level leadership.

There are about 1 million elected women representatives in Panchayats and Municipal Bodies in India. After 1993, women's participation in local governments increased quite radically, with the enactment of the legislation providing 33 percent reservation of seats for women in local bodies. The legislation and its implementation has added another local bodies as well as elected representatives in India. Statistics, as expressed in the following chart, shows participation of women in All India Services also shows a steady growth especially in IAS and IPS. Only IFS shows a decline since 1995.

Women selected in All India Services

Sources:

- I. Women in India – A Statistical Profile, 1997, DWCD, New Delhi.
- II. Department of Personnel, GOI, New Delhi
- III. Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI, New Delhi.
- IV. Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, New Delhi.

Developmental Indicators: Scopes & Opportunities

The Beijing conference (1995) indicators of women empowerment, both qualitative & quantitative, may provide necessary guideline and can play a

crucial role in successfully implementing the gender equality initiatives. A brief study of them can be of help in this regard.

Qualitative:

1. Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
3. Increase in decrease of personal leisure time and time for child care;
4. Increase on decrease of work loads in new programmes;
5. Change in roles and responsibility in family & community;
6. Visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
7. Responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
8. Visible changes in women's participation level attending meeting, participating and demanding participation;
9. Increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
10. Increase access to and ability to gather information;
11. Formation of women collectives;
12. Positive changes in social attitudes;
13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;
14. Women's decision-making over her work and income.

Quantitative indicators:

A. Demographic trends

- Maternal mortality rate
- Fertility rate
- Sex ratio
- Life expectancy at birth
- Average age of marriage

B. Number of women participating in different development programmes

C. Greater access and control over community resources/government schemes-crèche, credit cooperative, non formal education

D. Visible change in physical health status and nutritional level

E. Change in literacy and & enrolment levels

F. Participation levels of women in political process

A sincere approach and intention to improve upon the Beijing Conference (1995) Indicators will lead to successful implementation of empowerment of women by taking into consideration the key factors viz. process, agency and resources.

Conclusive Remarks

The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index for the year 2007, ranks India 114th among 128 countries. This index comprises of four indicators, namely, economic, political, educational and health subjects. All these four are intricately related to the status of women. Though the study of empowerment of women as a whole is not the present task, yet these parameters have to be referred because of their influence on overall empowerment process. Mainstreaming the gender perspective is essential to achieve parity between men and women where mainstreaming is a process

of assessing the implications for women and men in respect of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. Therefore, their capacity-building opportunities, employment and engagement in productive works etc. are explicitly identified and addressed for deriving decent outcome. In general terms, this process is considered as empowerment of women.

Women are focused upon because of their exclusion and invisibility in the development projects. In this respect, women in development approach advocated that women should be treated on equal terms with men. With effect from mid 1980s, women in development highlighting shifted from equity aspects to anti – poverty measures to efficiency with strong emphasis on income-generation activities and skill development strategies for women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on women in 1995 also called for the empowerment of women through enhancing their skills, knowledge, access to, and use of information technologies. The importance of these theoretical perspectives has high value.

Translation of these perspectives into appropriate policy of the respective national government and implementation of the plans and programmes however, is highly desirable for overall development of status of women in society. To conclude, the celebration of 8th March as Women's Day must become milestone of progress of women each year. The empowerment means not only to improve the status of women but also to change the traditional attitude on men towards women. The real struggle for women is taking place in each and every field, but she has to start from her ' home'....!

And from within...! The observation and comment of noted economist Prof. Amartya Sen, in this context is worth mentioning, who says: 'Nothing, arguably is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women. This is indeed a crucial aspect of "development as freedom".'

– Development as Freedom, Amartya Sen, 1999

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