



Empowerment of
WOMEN
in North East India

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

edited by

**Harendra Sinha
J. Zorema**



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Socio-economic Perspectives



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Lunglei, Mizoram
29th November, 2011

Harendra Sinha
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Introduction

The empowerment, equality and autonomy of women are globally recognized as a key factor to achieve progress in socio-economic and political spheres. It is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to which world leaders agreed at the Millennium Summit held in New York in 2000. Empowerment of women leads in raising women's self-awareness, skill development, creative decision-making and shaping as better citizens. It presents a way towards dignity and security for women, their families and the entire community. Political empowerment is valued as the most important one of all empowerments. It is regarded as the key driver for the economic and social empowerments. Their enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as key to redress the inherent gender inequalities in different societies.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country and the right of equal access to public service. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also states, *inter alia*, that every citizen shall have the right and opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely-chosen representatives, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections and to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his or her country. The provision for political empowerment of women got international attention with the Declaration of 'Convention on the Political Rights of Women' which states that women shall be on equal terms with men and without any discrimination entitled to vote in all elections, eligible for election to all publicly-elected bodies, entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions established by national law.

In India, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the States to adopt positive measures in favour of women. However, the demand for greater representation of women in political institutions was taken up in a systematic way with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which published its report in 1976. The Committee was set-up with a view to make recommendations for improvement of the socio-economic position of women. The CSWI report suggested that women's representation in political institutions, especially at the grass roots level, needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for them in Legislatures.

Since then, the empowerment of women has been accepted as the essential subject in determining the status of women. Various legislations, development plans and policies have been made aiming women's development in all spheres. Setting up of National Commission for Women by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women, provision for at least 33 per cent reservation of seats in the local bodies (now most of the States in India passed legislation for 50 per cent of seats reserved for women at the grass roots bodies following the Union Cabinet's decision, to bring a bill to amend Article 243(D) of the Constitution) of Panchayats and Municipalities by the Constitution of India 73rd and 74th Amendment (1993) which enables women's participation at the grass roots level and the proposed Bill of 33 per cent Reservation for Women in Parliament and State Legislatures if passed will usher a new chapter towards women's participation in decision making at all levels. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001 sets the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals in creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women and to enable them to realize their full potential. Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macroeconomic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. Special measures are being taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and

improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women.

However, in spite of the various legislations and provisions in the Constitution of India through various articles (Art. 14, 15, 23, 29, 30, 42, 45 etc.) for equal rights of women, Indian women continue to remain oppressed and struggle over everything from survival to resources. While women have made considerable progress in some areas such as education and employment, they continue to be subjected to the influence of the existing patriarchal attitudes in Indian society. The dilemma for Indian women today is that despite the liberal provisions of the Constitution and various laws, serious inequalities remain.

Women of North East India have no exception and face multiple hurdles in the overall backward economy of the region. The North East India comprises of eight small states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim) comprising the total area of the region of 2,55,036 sq. km of which 70 per cent is hilly terrain and deep valley. It represents about 7.5 per cent of India's landmass and 3.5 per cent of India's population (2001). Its population density of 143 per sq. km is much lower than the all-India figure of 313. Significantly, it accounts for 26 per cent of the national forest cover. About 90 per cent of the regions boundaries form India's international border with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. The region is extremely rich in terms of mineral and natural resources, yet suffers with low economic indicators. The document prepared by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy for North East Council says the per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of North East India is 31 per cent less than the national average. In 2004-05, the entire region's GSDP, a measure of the standard of living for people, was Rs. 18,027 against the national average of Rs. 25,968. Even within the region, there are vast differences in the plains and hills. To reach all-India level of per capita income in 2020, the GSDP of the North East region will have to grow at 11.8 per cent annually on an average (East Vision 2020 Document Paper). Women have been the victims of poverty, unemployment, exploitation, inequality and find it difficult to participate in the political process that has hitherto been a male bastion. There is lack of participation of women from grass roots level and political marginalization of women at the national, state and village level has always been prevailing in the region including Mizoram. Mizo society, being patriarchal, right from the beginning, attributed to the reigning of very few female chiefs. Some of the women chiefs were mostly successors of their husbands and were stand-bys, until their sons

were old enough to occupy the throne. It is sad to find out that there has never been a female Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha member from the State of Mizoram. The State never had a female Chief Minister and even a Speaker of the State Assembly till date.

The present work is an attempt in the aforesaid direction. The book "*Empowerment of Women in North East India: Socio-Economic Perspectives*" is a collection of twenty-three papers, mainly those presented in the ICSSR Sponsored State Level Seminar organized by Government J. Buana College, Lunglei, Mizoram. The papers presented in this volume have covered various dimensions concerning socio-economic and political empowerment of women in India and North East with special focus on Mizoram. We have divided the entire book into five sections. A section-wise highlight of this book is presented below.

The first section deals with the "*Empowerment of Women in India*". In this section, the paper entitled '*The Challenge of Empowering Women in India: The Current Dynamics*' presented by Hazra, observes that in spite of various initiatives insisting on women's rights, women in India are still much more likely to be poor, malnourished and illiterate and have less access than their counterparts to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. Women are far less likely than men to be politically active and are vulnerable to domestic violence. His paper reiterates that role and participation of women must be given high priority both because women have a fundamental right to enjoy equality with men in all aspects of life as well as their capacity in playing a crucial role in the sustainable development process. Debnath in his paper, '*Women in India: A Historical Perspective*' attempts to analyse the status of women in India from historical perspective and observed that women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period but in the later periods, the status of women began to decline with the Smritis and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later British Rule in India curtailed women's freedom and rights. Post-independence, democratic India marks a difference in the status of women where they participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology. Datta Roy in his attempt '*Panchayati Raj System: A Road to Women's Empowerment in India*' recommends that New Panchayati Raj Institutions can bring effective changes in women's life in respect of their social and political status and economic well-being, for which there is need for effective local-self governance where Indian women have to be more aware about their potentialities, responsibilities and rights and empowerment.

Women Empowerment is an integral part of rural development strategies in India and various programmes were initiated to ensure that women can get equal access to health, education and decision making in their households. Sanyal in her paper '*Women's Right to Health Care: Some Reflections from Cachar District, Assam, India*' made a case study on rural women and their health care decision making capacities in villages near Silchar, Assam. Roy and Vanlalveni in their paper '*Voice, Gender and Space in Time of Five Year Plans in India: The Idea of Lata Mangeshkar and Lalrindiki Khiangte*' attempted to explore on how, through the career of India's most famous female 'playback' singers—Lata Mangeshkar and Lalrindiki Khiangte (Mizoram) over previous two decades or so, a particular female singing voice with its characteristic tonality and modulation—became an expression of gender identity in India. Lata Mangeshkar is the conjunctive site and that of modern 'territorialised' understanding of 'culture' whereas Daduhi, in contrast, is the meeting site of fantasy of sound, orality, religious traditions along with identity and ethnicity.

The "*Women's Empowerment: North East India Perspective*" has been presented in section two. This includes the studies entitled '*Women Empowerment through MNREGS: A North East India Perspective*' by Singh and Zote examines the impact of MGNREGA on the North East women. The emergence of women workers through MGNREGA infused among women to play greater role in decision making in the family, confident about their role as contributors to family expenditures and control the use of their earnings and confidence to earn without support. They conclude that despite numerous problems, MNREGA is a programme that has begun to make a difference in the lives of women and there is a massive demand for MNREGA work. The administration needs to respond to it by increasing the scale of women employment. Majumder in her paper, '*Women in Panchayats: A Tripura Perspective*' highlights the changing role of women in panchayats and the evolution of panchayats and the New Panchayati Raj in the State of Tripura. She suggested that women should participate in the political process but at the same time they should be properly empowered economically. Education plays a vital role and the women leaders at the grass roots level should be trained and qualified so that they can perform their assigned responsibilities in a proper way.

Women are the prime targets of programmes that aim at improving maternal and child health and achieving other desired demographic goals. This is not surprising since women are the ones that bear children and are

typically the primary caregivers in households. An understanding of the status and empowerment of women in society and within their households is thus critical to promoting change in reproductive attitudes and behaviour, especially in patriarchal societies. The National Population Policy 2000, specifically identified the low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of population and maternal and child welfare goals. Sinha and Datta in their paper, '*Status of Women Empowerment and Health: An Analytical Study of Tripura*' made an attempt to analyze the status of women empowerment through participation of household decision making especially on mean ages of marriage and maternal healthcare indicators in Tripura. The study recorded that a good progress was made in some aspects and in some others it has to take corrective actions.

'*Political Empowerment and Women of Mizoram*' is the theme of section three. In this section, the paper entitled '*Religion and Political Empowerment: A Study on the Impact of Christianity on the Empowerment of the Tribal Women of Mizoram*' Paul examines the role of religion—Christianity in particular, in women's empowerment. Many aspects of life of the Mizo society are influenced by modernization/Westernization and this began particularly after the early part of 20th century when the Mizos came in contact with the British and the Christian Missionaries. Although traditional cultures were re-defined, patriarchy still continues to influence the Mizo society. Religion is the supreme factor that cannot only free women from the dominance of their complementary counterpart (man) but can also ensure the creation of a mindset wherein people are not discriminated on the basis of sex, caste, creed or colour but on the basis of one's ability and performance. The author hopes that the Mizo intellectuals, scholars, activists and Church leaders will come forward and take up the challenge in addressing the issue of gender discrimination in Mizoram. In their paper, '*Political Empowerment and Women of Mizoram: An Overview*' Pathak and Vanlalsiammawia stressed that real empowerment may be achieved by womenfolk only when they get political access, social recognition and economic development. Women in Mizoram possess nothing even though they did most of the work within and outside the house. They suggest effective democratization of the socio-economic and political structures in Mizoram to promote women's empowerment. The enhanced and effective political representation will be very important for equitable share in decision-making. Lalrinchhani in her paper, '*Political Empowerment in Patriarchic Society: A Study in Mizoram*' focuses on the participation of women in the patriarchic society in

Mizoram and try to look into the various problems which hindered women to take an active role at the decision making level particularly in the public elected offices. She argues that despite the abolition of the traditional institutions traditional values still lingers among the people. The patriarchal values reside not only in the minds of the men but strangely among the women also. The concept of patriarchy has to be questioned because as long as these norms exist, women would always be marginalized. Lalzahawma in his paper, '*Participation of Women in Contemporary Mizo Politics: An Analysis*' examines the participation of women in contemporary Mizo politics. Despite women's wings in almost every Church with several activities ranging from attending separate Church ceremony, rehabilitation, and spiritual rejuvenation and every political party also have 'mahila' or 'women wings' yet, their participation in the national, state and local politics is minimal. There are various factors leading to their marginalization in politics and there are different solutions, which, however, are delayed and neglected for long. He suggested for women's empowerment through legislation and reservation.

The fourth section deals with the "*Social and Economic Empowerment of Women: Perspectives on Mizoram*". In this section, the paper entitled '*Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women: A Study with Special Reference to Mizoram*' Sundaram made an analysis on women's empowerment programmes and its implementation and utilizations with special reference to Mizoram. He stressed on the effective implementation and utilization of Women Empowerment Programme in India and Mizoram in particular which will safeguard the interests of women. '*Empowerment and Women in the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram with Special Reference to Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC)*' presented by DOUNGEL analyses the role and status of women in the Sixth Schedule areas of Mizoram with a case study of the LADC area. Women in the study area seem to be fairly empowered in the field of government service, economic sector and in Church activities. Yet, their present involvement in politics seems to be not up to the mark which required further empowerment and suggested for a balanced growth with evolutionary process without disturbing the social norms and not in a revolutionary process. In her paper, '*Economic Contribution of Women in Mizoram*', COLBERT analyses the economic participation of women in Mizoram. Her paper identified that Mizo women although contribute immensely to the economy of the State but does not control properties acquired through their hard earned labour resulting in very unsound economic conditions. Women rendered their services in the *jhum* or office and all the

responsibilities of the home like washing, buying and preparing food, cleaning and beautifying of houses and campus, fetching water and collecting fuelwood, caring for domestic animals like pigs and poultry, kitchen gardening, rearing of children—feeding, clothing, studies, medicating, looking after husband and his belongings, and so on and so forth which are never ending, right from early morning till late at night but without having authority and decision making in the family. The paper entitled '*Role of Mizo Women in Economy*' by Zorema examines how far, in a patriarchal Mizo society women are involved in the economy of the State. He analyzed the factors that hinder women's development and to bring light on how women are affected by programmes, projects and policies. He suggested for women's cooperatives as a strategy to expand their access to information, increase their comparative bargaining power, and create opportunities for collective actions to access economic inputs. Vanlalkulhpuia and Singh in their paper '*Socio-Economic Empowerment of Mizo Women through Rashtriya Mahila Kosh: An Analysis*' made an attempt to analyse the socio-economic empowerment of Mizo women through Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK). They found that Mizoram is far behind with regards to the performance and achievements of the RMK in comparison with other States of the North East and suggested that effective implementation part should be taken by creating awareness regarding the workings and benefits of RMK with regular trainings and workshops. In his paper '*Empowerment of Women through Entrepreneurship: A Study of Mizo Women*', Singha made an attempt to highlight the various aspects of women entrepreneurs and the challenges and opportunities of Mizo women entrepreneurs in the era of globalization. He found that the growth of women entrepreneurship is slow in Mizoram due to various constraints such as lack of education, dual role of women, lack of aptitudes and training, lack of freedom to choose a job according to ability, custom and family burden, small market, financial problem and suggested various aspects like infrastructure, initiative to promote investment and entrepreneurship with proper marketing strategy and focus on business opportunities on trade with neighbouring countries, agro and food processing, sericulture, handloom and handicrafts to develop.

Section five has presented the "*Women's Empowerment: Barriers and Strategies*". In this section, Ahmed in an attempt '*Political Empowerment of Women in Mizoram: Barriers and Strategies*' observed that women in Mizoram are largely educated and they have attained an honoured place in the economy and society, but in politics they are miserably lagging behind. He suggested for a combined strategy along

with reservation for political empowerment of Mizo women and awareness of women's political rights, increasing political activities by autonomous women's organizations, and even the formation of an exclusive women's political party. Zohra in a study entitled '*Barriers to Women's to Empowerment in the Mizo Society*' discusses the barriers and constraints of women's empowerment in Mizoram. The well-knit and deep-rooted socio-cultural system makes patriarchy invincible and in Mizo family and society women are completely dominated by male authority. Despite various attempts made by different women's organizations to raise the status of women and leadership, the Mizo women have not achieved their objectives.

The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments (1993) have served as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structure for women which laid a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the grass roots level. The provision of not less than one-third of the total seats for membership as well as office of chairperson of each tier of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) to be reserved for women is very significant. It is significant in minimizing marginalization of women and strengthening democracy by bringing women in policy formulation and implementation. With no provision of reservation of seats in the traditional Village Councils—the local self-governing bodies in Mizoram and the patriarchal values prevalent right from earlier times, there is lesser presence of women in the village administration. Sinha in his paper '*Empowerment of Women at the Grass-roots: Relevance of New Panchayati Raj Institutions in Mizoram*' explores on the trends of woman's participation in the Village Councils since 1954 in Mizoram, tries to identify the causes of lesser participation of women at the grass roots level and analyses the relevance of the implementation of new Panchayati Raj Institutions in Mizoram. In his paper '*Gender Inequality in Contemporary Mizo Society*' Vanlaldika made an attempt to highlight the causes of gender inequality in Mizo society today. Despite the progress made by women in improving their status and role as compared with the past with the arrival of the British and Christian Missionaries and policies undertaken by the Government of India for the upliftment of the status of women, yet gender inequality very much persist in Mizo society. With independence, there has been a constitutional commitment to promote justice, liberty, and equality, yet women still face discrimination in socio-economic and politico-religious spheres of the society. The mentality of the Mizo society was such that women are still considered as less intelligent and incapable of tackling a

rather difficult and crucial problems or dilemmas. The values and norms of society viewed that women should be docile, timid, obedient, acquiescent, respectful, and live under the influence of the husband. This kind of attitude was persisted amongst the male-folk of the society. He stressed on the complete transformation of the psyche of the society which is very much required for the overall abrogation of gender inequality in her research paper '*Women Prisoners in Mizoram: A Case Study of Lunglei District Jail*' found that women prisoners are on a rise during the last few decades in Mizoram and they are not aware of their rights in the prison. The management authorities on the other hand, are not making any generous effort to make corrective measures. Her field study reveals that the basic facilities are lacking for the women and their children; also the prisoners are not provided with correctional opportunities and she recommends some measures to improve their conditions.

The anthology of the present publication is expected to be a significant contribution to knowledge on the issues related to women's empowerment in India. It is expected to be very useful to the common people, policy makers, government officials and non-governmental organizations. The book may prove to be very helpful to the academicians, students and research scholars in particular as the papers will offer priceless inputs to make more in-depth study of the problems.

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SECTION I

Empowerment of Women in India

The Challenge of Empowering Women in India:

The Current Dynamics

Anupam Hazra

Introduction

Current framework of international development recognizes women empowerment as an immense effective stratagem for the all-round development of the society. The empowerment of women is a contemporary issue regardless of the country in which a social planner tries to bring a sustainable development. Though women empowerment is not a sufficient condition but it is being regarded as a necessary condition in order to stabilize and in turn to have sustainability of the development process. In the current context of development, empowerment is now increasingly being regarded as a process by which one has without power gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision making power and control leading to transformative action. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.' For her, empowerment is inescapably bound with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change and women themselves must become agents of that change if empowerment has to take place.

Thus, empowering women implies enhancing women's ability to do, their capability to accomplish tasks, their command over events and their ability to exercise influence. In essence, it is power that stems from new

Table 1.1: A Model Exploring the Dynamics of Women Empowerment from Multi-dimensional Perspectives

Dimension	At Family Level	At Society/Community Level	At State/National Level
Economic	Self-employment opportunities for women; Women's involvement in income-generating activities; Contribution to family income; Access to and control of family resources.	Women's access to employment opportunities; Access to credit facilities; Ownership of land and assets; Women's association and involvement in microenterprises.	Strong framework for gender budgeting; Enhancement in allocation for gender budgeting; Representation of women's economic interests in macro-economic policies, Non-discrimination in payment of wages at work places on the basis of gender.
Socio-cultural	Women's freedom of movement; Non-discriminatory treatment to daughters; Initiatives towards educating girl child.	Space for women's participation in social sphere; Symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual; Existence of women's association in society; Shift in patriarchal norms such as preference to male child.	Affirmative media-representation for women highlighting their roles and contributions for the nation; Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options.
Familial/Interpersonal	Active involvement in decision making process of family; Control over sexual relations; Ability to make childbearing decisions; Freedom from domestic violence.	Societal values and norms emphasising greater importance and autonomy for women e.g. self-selection of spouses; Removal of the practice of dowry; Acceptability of divorce; Campaign against domestic violence.	Systems providing easy access to reproductive health services.

Dimension	At Family Level	At Society/Community Level	At State/National Level
Legal	Knowledge about women's basic rights; Family support and encouragement for exercising women's rights.	Ensuring Right to enjoy equality with men in all aspects of life; Community consciousness about women's rights; Social advocacy for ensuring women's rights; effective local enforcement of legal rights.	Strict enforcement of legislations protecting women's rights and promoting women empowerment, Media support for ensuring proper implementation of Acts and legislations ensuring women welfare; Active judicial system to address women's rights' violations.
Political	Knowledge of political as well as democratic system and means of access to it; Domestic support for political involvement.	Representation in local bodies of government; Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns.	Women's representation in regional and national decision making bodies of government e.g. Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies; Representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups.
Psychological	Respect from every member of the family; An increase in self-esteem; A feeling of self-efficacy and psychological well-being.	A well-accepted social identity and social status; Women's sensitivity and collective awareness about gender-based injustice and discrimination.	Women's sense of inclusion in the process of national development.

Source: Author's articulation based on Siwal (2005).

knowledge and skills acquired, action taken and inner strength gained from educational experiences.

Women Empowerment: A Key to the Millennium Commitments

Since the early 90s, women have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and the Beijing Platform for Action have provided new impetus for governments and civil society organisations to address women empowerment and gender inequalities in society at all levels. It was recognized that without active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making process—the goals of equality, development and peace for women and men cannot be achieved. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programmes. Societies that discriminate on the basis of gender have greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance, and a lower standard of living. Women's empowerment, lies at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. (World Bank, 2001).

Women Empowerment and the Millennium Development Goals

<p>Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need-based capacity-building and a better access to livelihood opportunities for women will provide a major boost to family-income, accelerating country's economic growth and ensuring a stronger platform for poverty eradication for the nation. • Equal investment in women's health and nutritional status reduces chronic hunger and malnourishment, which increases productivity and well-being.
<p>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educated girls and women have greater control over their fertility and participate more in public life. • A mother's education is a strong and consistent determinant of her children's school enrolment and attainment of their health and nutrition outcomes.
<p>Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empowerment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's empowerment which ultimately leads to gender equality lies at the heart of sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Though women empowerment is not a sufficient condition but it is still a necessary condition in order to stabilize and in turn to have sustainability of the development process.

(Contd.)

Goal 4. Reduce child mortality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research-based evidences proved that a mother's education, income, and empowerment have a significant impact on lowering child mortality.
Goal 5. Improve maternal health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies revealed that a mother's education, income, and empowerment have a significant impact on lowering maternal mortality.
Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater economic independence for women, increased ability to negotiate safe sex, greater awareness of the need to alter traditional norms around sexual relations, better access to treatment, and support for the care function that women perform are essential for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other epidemics.
Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are often regarded as primary users of environmental resources and if they are educated and empowered enough, they can manage the environmental resources in a more sustainable manner in comparison to men.
Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater space in the political sphere for women may lead to higher investments in development cooperation.

The MDG goal to ensure women empowerment and to achieve gender equality recognizes the costs to society of continued female disadvantage. As compared to the other goals in the MDGs, the goal to reduce gender disparities is unique because it is not specific to any one sector or issue, such as health, education, or access to water; instead it cuts across all the sectors and issues addressed in the MDGs and its success depends on the extent to which it is addressed within each of the other sector-specific goals. Moreover, the goal of gender equality is pre-eminent among the MDGs because if it is not achieved, none of the other goals can be fully met.

The Global Gender Gap Index introduced by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2006, is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress. The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. World Economic Forum in its latest Global Gender Gap Index for the year 2009, ranked India in the bottom half among 134 countries, placing it in the 114th position in terms of gender equality. As per the report, India performed very poorly on the economic, education and health sub-indexes; the overall scores are partially bolstered by relatively good

performances in the sphere of political empowerment of women. (WEF, 2009) 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. In India women are nearly 50 per cent of the total population but their representation in public life is very low. Women bear the major load of the household work. Her primary role is often viewed by the society as housewife. The plight of women in India ranges from domestic disparity to societal oppression. In most of the areas in India, a strong cultural bias favours sons over daughters. Female children frequently suffer neglect in terms of health care and education. Studies reveal that boys receive health care more often than girls, and the average amount spent on treatment was also significantly higher for boys (Coonrod, 1998). Subordination of women in society acts a structural constraint to their participation in political activities. This constraint operates more or less for all classes and communities of women. Prevalent culture which is very complicated and often decisions are taken behind the scene may be regarded as another constraint in this regard. Recognising women's rights and believing their ability are essential for women's empowerment and development. Females should realize their own capabilities and potentials which will strengthen their self-image and foster them with confidence to take action in life. Political empowerment does not imply just a right to role silently but to discuss, share and empower politics by knowing its pros and cons and thereby to influence policies and decision-making.

Welfare Measures for Women in India

Over the past three decades, women's empowerment has been increasingly recognized as a crucial factor for any country's holistic and sustainable development. Several programmes and projects across the world have been launched and are currently in progress to bring social, economic and political equity and broader access to basic livelihood needs. In order to bring women into the mainstream and to encourage their participation in the process of national development has, therefore, been a major concern of the Government. Since independence, the Government of India

has always given great importance to the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and has been committed towards achieving it. Within the framework of a democratic polity, India's laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. The Constitution is firmly grounded in the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice. It contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as justiciable fundamental rights. The Constitution explicitly clarifies that affirmative action programmes for women are not incompatible with the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of sex. Drawing the strength from the constitutional commitments, the Government of India has been engaged in the continuous endeavour of concretely translating all the rights, commitments and safeguards incorporated in the Indian Constitution for women.

Constitutional Safeguards for Women

- ❖ Article 14 – Equal rights and opportunities for men and women in political, economic and social spheres.
 - ❖ Article 15(1) – Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.
 - ❖ Article 15(3) – Empowers the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women.
 - ❖ Article 16 – Provides equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
 - ❖ Article 39(a) – The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.
 - ❖ Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
 - ❖ Article 42 – Directs the state to ensure provisions for just and humane condition of work and maternity relief.
 - ❖ Article 46 – The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
 - ❖ Article 47 – The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health.
 - ❖ Article 51(A)(e) – Mandates every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
 - ❖ Article 243 D(3) – Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
 - ❖ Article 243 D(4) – Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women.
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The approach on women development changed from viewing women as beneficiaries of social services to contributors of social and economic development process in nation building. Development approach has attempted to address not only women's immediate needs but also their strategic gender interests addressing inequalities in employment, political participation and cultural and legal status. In the last few decades, a significant shift has been apparent in the planning process of the country. Approach towards empowering women, which was started with 'welfare' in the fifties, shifted to 'development' in the seventies and has been successfully continuing with the approach of 'empowerment' from the nineties onwards under different Five Year Plans—which is evident from Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: How the Issue of 'Women Empowerment' has been Addressed in Different Five Year Plans

The First Five Year Plan (1951–1956)	...Central Social Welfare Board was set-up in 1953 to promote activities leading to women welfare through funding to voluntary organisations, charitable trusts and philanthropic agencies etc.
The Second Five Year Plan (1956–1961)	...Recognised special needs of women at work place such as ensuring maternity benefits, crèche facilities for the children of working women and provision of equal pay for equal work etc.
The Third Plan (1961–1966)	...A major focus was given on women's education, pre-natal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers.
The Interim plans (1966–1969) & The Fourth Plan (1969–1974)	...Continued with its emphasis on gender mainstreaming. The basic approach was to promote women's welfare within the family as the basic unit of operation. The outlay on family planning was stepped up.
The Fifth Plan (1974–1979)	...Identified areas of health, family planning, nutrition, education, employment, legislation and social welfare for formulating and implementing action programmes for women and called for planned intervention towards women empowerment. This plan marked a major shift in the approach towards women, from welfare towards development.

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<p>The Sixth Plan (1980–85)</p>	<p>...Accepted women's development as a separate economic agenda. The Multi-disciplinary approach with three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment. The Sixth Five Year Plan onwards, the plan document has been including a separate chapter on women and children.</p>
<p>The Seventh Plan (1985–1990)</p>	<p>... Declared as its objective to bring women into the mainstream of national development. During this period, the Department of Women and Child (DWCD) was established within the Ministry of Human Resource Development of Govt. of India. The Seventh Plan introduced the concept of monitoring of 27 beneficiary oriented schemes for women by DWCD. The exercise continues and number of schemes covered is being expanded.</p>
<p>The Eighth Plan (1992–1997)</p>	<p>...Highlighted for the first time a gender perspective and the need to ensure a definite flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women. The Plan document states that "...the benefits to development from different sectors should not bypass women and special programmes on women should be complement to the general development programmes. The latter, in turn, should reflect greater gender sensitivity". This plan projected paradigm shift, from development to empowerment and promised to ensure flow of benefits to women in the core sectors of education, health and employment. Outlay for women rose from 4 crores in the First Plan to Rs. 2000 crores in the Eighth Plan.</p>
<p>The Ninth Plan (1997– 2002)</p>	<p>...Adopted 'Women Component Plan' as one of the major strategies and directed both the Central and State Governments to ensure not less than 30 per cent of the funds/benefits are earmarked in all the women's related sectors. Special vigil was advocated on the flow of the earmarked funds or benefits through an effective mechanism to ensure that the proposed strategy brings forth a holistic approach towards empowering women. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 of Gol adopted during this period envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy.</p>

<p>The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002–2007)</p>	<p>....Suggested specific strategies, policies and programmes for empowerment of women. They are as follows: Measurement of development has to go beyond achievement of GDP growth to indicators of distributive justice and their monitoring. Women headed households have to be specifically targeted, identifying added disadvantages in the rural and urban locations with reference to different parameters of deprivation. Formulation of Gender Development Indicators to measure Human Development and their use as a tool for monitoring development needs to be hastened. It appreciated efforts at ensuring gender-just and gender-sensitive budget and promised to continue the process of dissecting the government budget to establish its gender-differential impact and to translate gender commitment to budgetary commitments. It made provision of outlay of Rs. 13,780 crores. It accepted that Women Component Plan and Gender Budget play complimentary role for effective convergence, proper utilization and monitoring of fund from various developmental sectors. The Ministry of Women and Child Development was established during this plan period.</p>
<p>The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007–2012)</p>	<p>The Approach Paper of this plan mentions... "gender equity requires adequate provisions to be made in policies and schemes across Ministries and Departments." It also entails 'strict adherence to Gender Budgeting across the board.' It promises special focused efforts for creation of 'an enabling environment for women to become economically, politically and socially empowered'.</p>

Source: Five Year Plan Documents.

The Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation also promoting the socio-economic status of women. Among the major legislations—the Hindu Succession Act was enacted to give daughters equal rights as sons in ancestral property. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act has been amended to strengthen its

provisions, enforce more stringent punishment for traffickers and prevent re-victimisation of victims. States are being requested to set-up anti-human trafficking units. In recent times, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) seeks to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work; under MGNREGA, priority has been given to women by reserving at least one-third of the jobs for women who have registered and requested for work under this Act.

Besides these legislative measures, India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. At the same time, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has been implementing a number of schemes, which strive towards both economic and social empowerment of women. The Ministry has set-up support systems like working women hostels and crèches to help employed women in their struggle towards economic empowerment. *Swadhar* and short stay homes have been set-up to provide shelter and care services for women in distress. Considering the increasing need of shelter homes, it is proposed to set-up one *Swadhar* home per district. The scheme for construction of working women's hostel has also been revamped. The Ministry also implements laws and legislations for women including Sati Prevention Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act etc. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is first of its kind in the country to get into the private sphere of a household. For the first time, the term 'domestic violence' has been widened in meaning and scope from the culture specific restriction of 'dowry deaths' and penal provisions to positive civil rights of protection and injunction. A Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation of Victims of Rape has also been formulated to assist the rape victims in restoring their dignity and self-confidence. For economic empowerment *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh* (RMK) was established in 1993 under Department of Women and Child Development to ensure micro-credit facilities through micro-credit organizations such as NGOs and Voluntary Organisations, women development corporations, women co-operative societies, suitable Govt. or local bodies etc. Flagship schemes like *Swayamsiddha* and *Swa-Shakti* were introduced and taking into consideration the success of the programmes, the Ministry proposes to take up the second phase of *Swayamsiddha* during the Eleventh Plan. The lessons learnt in *Swayamsiddha*, Phase-I and *Swa-Shakti* has been

proposed to be incorporated in the next phase giving an integrated set of training inputs relating to social and economic empowerment, including skill development and training in traditional and non-traditional sectors.

Empowering Women: Filling the Gaps

Despite of these efforts, women in India still continue to be discriminated and their current status still causes concern. Although the constitution provides legal equality for men and women but social and economic equality is yet to achieve. This is the fact why Indian women continue to be recipients of welfare and remain at a lower status with low literacy and poor access to resource and facilities. The problem persists despite the vibrant resistance by the women's movement to this over the past several decades. In most parts of India today, women constitute a disproportionate share of the chronically poor population. Indian women face gender discrimination throughout their life within the family, society and at workplace that runs common across the country along all class, caste and religion with varying degrees. Gender division of labour prevails in all sectors of employment. Gender discrimination starts from the foetus, in terms selection of sex, childrearing, feeding, education, employment, control over property and resources, participation and influencing decision-making in public and political spheres etc. Women need self-confidence to fight against all the atrocities against her and to live self-esteemed life. Hence, boosting the morale and self-confidence of the women, is the key to eliminate their inferior complex. Women also have all the potential and empowering women will help to use her full capability and mitigate the economic dependency of women. Empowering women with decision-making aptitude, education and employment will make the society to accept the women as an equal gender like male.

Women's political participation has been considered a major measure of women's empowerment; but in India, attempts to secure political representation particularly in higher political arenas have not been so successful. Fresh impetus is required with a modern approach. Indian democracy is 60 years old now, yet the participation of women in politics has actually declined since the days of the freedom movement, both in quantity and quality. Having a high participation of women at the local self-Government level can create an environment which is enabling for other women, receptive to the idea of gender based initiatives and can serve to monitor and implement community and gender based programmes of the government related to education, nutrition and health. It is also now

often pointed out that women's empowerment must be seen as a process wherein we must consider women's awareness consciousness, choices with live alternatives, resources at their disposal, voice, agency and participation. These are all related to enhancement of women's capabilities and decisions they take individually or collectively for themselves. An overview on the role of position of women in these institutions indicates that women have entered these institutions for the first time by introduction of the policy of reservation but, yet they have to go a long way to prove that they are equally capable as men. The policy of reservation provided for women is important not as an end in itself but a step forward in promoting women's participation in the grass roots of democracy.

Dowry has always been an important part of marriages in India, especially of Hindu marriages. Although dowry was legally prohibited in 1961 by Dowry Prohibition Act but it continues to be highly institutionalized. It is ridiculous to notice that even among highly educated sections; the articles of dowry are proudly exhibited in the marriage as a status symbol. In some parts of the country particularly in rural India, dowry still remains the major reason for all the discrimination and injustice shown to women. On the other hand, the changing socio-economic scenario and the phasing out of the joint family system along with poor community based protection systems are some of the reasons why women are becoming increasingly prone to violence and abuse. The weak law enforcement and gender insensitivity of the various functionaries fail to check the growing violence against women. At the same time, the extremely poor levels of awareness amongst women themselves on their rights also perpetuate violence against them. The lack of adequate rehabilitation and reintegration facilities is another crucial factor that finds victimized women further victimized or ostracized by the community. The media too does not reflect gender issues with sympathy and sensitivity; instead there is a tendency to glorify patriarchal traditions or to depict women as objects of sexual entertainment.

On the other hand, though more than 40 Gender Cells have been set-up in various Departments and Ministries but studies suggested that the following few factors like: (i) Gender budgeting statement covers only the specifically targeted programmes for women and pro-women programmes, which constitute less than 5 per cent of total budget. The real challenge of gender budgeting is to explore the rest 95 per cent of the budget through gender lens, (ii) Officers of the Gender Budgeting Cell are rarely consulted at the time of formulation of the Annual Plan/Budget of the Department, (iii) There is a significant deviation between

the budget allocations and the revised estimates and in turn actual spending, (iv) Unavailability of sex-disaggregated data, (v) The problem of proliferation of too many programmes with too little money continues over the years, and (vi) Senior officers involved in policy formulation of the Department are still not fully aware of the concepts of gender budgeting as such workshops are generally attended by lower level officers or officers in Gender Budgeting Cells etc.—creating obstacles in mainstreaming the gender budget initiatives in India. (Hazra, 2010)

Keeping into consideration the hindering factors—there is an urgent need to build the capacity of the Gender Budgeting Cells that have been set-up in various Ministries. In fact, the Central Government and the Planning Commission should take strong measures for getting the Ministries and Departments to implement WCP, and collect and report gender disaggregated data on their programmes and schemes. Gender Budgeting cannot be seen in isolation from the overall economic-political scenario. Identifying and listing resource allocations for women is only a part of the whole approach of Gender Budgeting. The crux of the issue is the overall economic policy framework in which we operate. If the overall economic framework continues to be driven by a philosophy of withdrawal of the state from important social and economic sectors, its impact on women would be much more harmful than what some additional resource allocations or schemes for women here or there—can mitigate. Gender Budgeting must be adopted to address socio-economic discrimination against women because many policy commitments can only be achieved if sufficient funds are allocated for their implementation. Women's and men's needs, concerns and priorities differ due to their different roles in society and in case these differences are not recognized—the way a government raises and spends money can have a negative impact on women by perpetuating the existing inequalities. Taking into consideration the contemporary scenario, following initiatives may be effective to provide an impetus to the process of women empowerment:

How to Strengthen Efforts towards Women Empowerment: Some Suggestive Measures

- Women's groups, civil society, and government agencies need to push for change in the rules, structures, and processes that specify how resources are allocated and how tasks, responsibilities, and values are assigned in institutions as well as in the society more broadly.

- Promote participatory democracy and decentralise planning processes.
- Need of an increased consultation with women's groups in the planning process, especially at the grass roots level.
- Provisioning more financial resources and power to make decisions directly to Panchayat to empower them; women representatives at *panchayat* level should get more autonomy.
- Ensuring provision of vocational training in traditional sector, suitable employment and income-generation activities with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant.
- Movement towards experiments in gender responsive budgeting. However, one cannot ignore the challenges that face the process but gender budgeting must be implemented across all Ministries and all machineries, including at the state and *panchayat* levels.
- Engendering social audits and making gender audits mandatory for all the Government schemes.
- Measures to improve the status, role and participation of women must be given high priority both because women have a fundamental right to enjoy equality with men in all aspects of life and because women can play a crucial role in and must fully participate in the sustainable development process. It is therefore essential to integrate gender perspectives in policies, projects and programmes that can be achieved by gender analysis.
- Adopting policies to reduce women's vulnerability to violence; ensure adequate infrastructure and budgets for the Implementation of Domestic Violence Act and for safe environs outside home.
- Adopting a comprehensive life-cycle approach towards women's health and malnourishment; from cradle to the grave, with women-centred health initiatives to reduce the maternal mortality rate.
- There is a marked lack of sensitivity to gender issues at all levels, be it government or bureaucracy or media or the mainstream civil society; these issues need to be acknowledged and should be given due attention to be addressed.
- Immediate steps need to be taken to control the declining child sex ratio by regulating medical practitioners and giving due emphasis to the implementation of the PCPNDT Act.
- Initiatives should be taken to enact a comprehensive gender

specific law on sexual violence with an expanded definition of rape, with gender neutral provisions to address child sexual abuse.

- Leaders and policy-makers seem to require more intense technical expertise and knowledge of how to mainstream gender concerns into development policies and programmes, so suitable provision for their knowledge-building and need-based training regarding this issue needs to be arranged.
- Government and non-governmental organizations need adequate funding for direct interventions and to build capacity in collecting data and evaluating programmes and policies for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Empowering women is being considered as the basic to the basics of human rights where she wants neither to beg for power nor search for power hierarchy to exercise power against others. On the contrary, she demands to be accepted as human first of all. Measures to improve the status, role and participation of women must be given high priority both because women have a fundamental right to enjoy equality with men in all aspects of life as well as because women are capable of playing a crucial role in the sustainable development process. In order to bring women into the mainstream and to encourage their participation in the process of national development, therefore, should remain the priority of the Government.

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