
HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract: “Women’s rights are human rights” was first declared in the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in the year 1993. The Conference also established that any neglect of human rights is a human rights violation and drew attention to the relationship between gender and human rights violation. Human rights of women generally include non-discrimination on the ground of sex, freedom from poverty, sustainable economic and social development, full and equal participation of women in power and decision-making. Though women possess immense potential to bring social transformation in the society they are generally not allowed to play major role in the corridor of power and influence which is generally vested with their male counterparts. The Indian Constitution has guaranteed equality of men and women. But in reality women in India generally don’t enjoy equal rights like the men in the family and in the community as well. The way women experience violations of human rights which are quite different from that of men. Every injustice that a woman suffers is human right violations which engross major concern in multiple dimensions.

The women empowerment need to be Holistic in its approach (political, social and economic), universal (equal opportunity in all fields), participative (in decision making) and inclusive (broad based). So the process of empowering women should necessarily bring down the discrimination and atrocities against common women so that every woman would have the strength and courage to stand up for their own rights and privileges. The women in the 21st Century have all right to enjoy and exercise Right to information, Right to development, Right to choose which also includes freedom from fear and freedom from torture.

Introduction: Empowerment of women can be defined as a process of awareness, capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision making power and control leading to transformative action. So empowerment can be viewed as a mean for creating a social environment where one can take decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for desirable social change, creating strength and innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience. The reason for empowering women lies in the facts that for centuries women were not treated equally with men in many ways and they were not allowed to own property, they did not have a share in their paternal property, they had no voting rights, they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women there is a need for strong movement to fight for women’s rights and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the empowerment of women. Women are less likely to have access to land, credit, decent jobs even though a growing body of research shows that the achievement of gender equality has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Occupational segregation and gender wage gaps continue to persist in all parts of the world. Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities. The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making

(Hazarika,2011).

The notion women’s human rights’ is fundamental and revolutionary which has created significant scope and opportunities for all women around the world to assert their rights and utilize opportunities. Women as human beings, have right to live with dignity and equality with men. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) has confirmed that women’s rights are human rights and identified gender and human rights violation. Women’s rights are human rights have profound transformative potentials. “A woman’s human rights framework equips women with a way to define, analyze, and articulate their experiences of violence, degradation, and marginality. The idea of women’s human rights has facilitated the creation of collaborative strategies for promoting and protecting women’s human rights. The incorporation of women’s perspectives into human rights standards and practice forces recognition of women’s dignity and respect they deserve simply as human beings” (Bunch & Frost, 2000). Like men, the women are also entitled to equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights in the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural field. These rights include, the rights to life; equality; liberty and security of the person; equal protection under the law; freedom from discrimination; the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health; just and favourable conditions of work, freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman treatment or punishment. The human rights of women has been defined as collective right of a women and accepted as a person with the capacity to decide or act on her own life having equal access to resources with equitable social, economic and political support to develop her full potential, exercise her right as full human being and to support the development of others. In a human rights approach, the positions poor

women as key actors in the development process, rather than as passive recipients of aid. Yet the involvement of poor women and the involvement of civil society in the MDG process has been largely peripheral to date. At the national level, the MDGs remain the principal tool for participating in the MDG process and for holding governments to account. It is therefore essential that they are made accessible to everyone, including the poorest and most marginalised people, and that these people are empowered to participate meaningfully in the reporting and monitoring process. More and better access to information and data concerning the Goals would, of course, not, by itself, achieve women's empowerment. The goals must also seek to address the nature of gender relations and the environment in which women exercise their agency. This means tackling the inequality and the denial of rights at all levels, including the macro-economic structures, the political institutions, and the cultural practices and attitudes that sustain forms of discrimination.

If we look into the position of women in Indian society it is observed that discrimination against women is systemic, embedded in socio-cultural norms and laws that structure the family, community, workplace and the state policies. In spite of having comprehensive legislations and broad policy framework, the government and civil societies initiatives, there is no spectacular change in the status of Indian women at the grassroots level. Even today the common women experience intense discriminations and exclusions for securing their socio-cultural, economic and political rights. While thinking of women development of the nation or state wide discrepancies are noticed in laws, policies, development plans and programmes and their implementation. Despite Constitutional Safeguards and piece-meal legal reforms, women have unequal succession, inheritance, adoption, guardianship rights, and no right to matrimonial property. The Indian Government should reform religion-based family laws (Uniform Civil Code) to bring parity between spouses in divorce, matrimonial property, guardianship, and succession" (WGHR,2012). The national development strategies adopted by Govt of India through ratification and adoption of provisions specified in international conventions in order to bring significant changes within the framework of democratic principles through introducing social legislations, development policies, plans and programme for advancement of women in different spheres. Several initiatives have been taken both by the Central and State Governments to protect as well as to promote women's rights in India. However, the benefits of such development initiatives have not reached to the common women beneficiaries at the grassroots level to the expected level. Hence there is a need to systematically address the fundamental issues and challenges directly linking to the women's rights in India through critically analyzing the present state of affairs, existing gender related legislations, policies and

programme and identifying the major issues and challenges in ensuring women's rights in India.

The women's rights are still being ignored and uncounted to a large extent and it remains a 'social epidemic' not only in our society but everywhere. The women all over the world are assigned secondary status to that of men. Though women play complementary role with the male counterparts both in the family and community as well and no family or society is complete without the required contributions of women in the respective sphere of life still the women are forbidden to lead respectable position in the society which is mainly noticed in the developing countries. While exploring the present status of women in India, the situation seems very complex. In Indian society today, women encounter multiple forms of discriminations based on gender, caste and many other factors which affect women's dignity and violate the principles of equality of rights. the discrimination and exploitation against women still continue in large scale. The persistent hunger, abject poverty, illiteracy, high mortality and morbidity have further intensified the problem. Today, millions of women live, work and struggle to survive. Whether it is a fight for safe drinking water, sound health and literacy or resisting dowry, violence and sexual harassment against women, vibrant and active women's movements have been emerged in many parts of India, aiming at empowering women to lead descent life. Around 120 millions of Indian women live in abject poverty and maternal mortality rate in rural areas is highest in the world (NFHS,2006). 50,000 women die every year during child birth and pregnancy related incidents. The declining child sex ratio due to abortions of female fetus, rising incidence of violence against women in family and community such as dowry deaths, bride burning, rape, murder, sexual harassments of women have increased alarmingly in recent days. Despite decadal increase in women literacy by 49 per cent, every third woman in India is illiterate. Despite a constant focus on women's education as a priority in global discussions of human rights and quality of life, and in the efforts of activists of all sorts and many governments, women still lag well behind men in many countries of the world, even at the level of basic literacy.

The violation of human rights of women is rampant in India with the introduction of new economic policies. The enforcement of neo-economic liberalization, globalization, militarization, global war on terror and fundamentalism has posed constant threat to women's human rights. The women suffer in greater number and to greater degree in comparison to men. It is the women who bear the primary responsibilities of the family to end hunger, meet health and nutritional needs, education and family income. But, the non-recognition of women's rights over resources and restrictions on their uses in the family and society has led to subjugation, marginalization and disempowerment of women. The emergence of liberalization and

globalization in India in the early 1990's further aggravated their problems in many dimensions which affect their healthy survival and many of them have lost their livelihood.

Empowerment – A Conceptual Framework: The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in 1960. Since then it has been interpreted differently in various social, political and economic development sectors which range between defining it as largely an individual process of taking control of and responsibility of one's life situation, or defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged section of society. At the former end of the continuum, where empowerment is defined largely as an individual process, empowerment can be used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security. Instead, the argument makes individuals and communities responsible for their own social security and welfare, without providing the necessary support and resources. The empowerment of women is located within the discourse of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of organizations for international development, more as a means of achieving gender equality than as an end in itself. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 Governments committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This commitment was made operationalised in a clear cut plan of action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations."

The United Nations definition of women's empowerment includes five components i) women's sense of self worth, ii) the right to have and to determine choices iii) the right to have opportunities and resources iv.) the right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside home; v) the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order nationally and internationally. Empowerment involves greater autonomy to avail one's wants and to influence others over one's concern. Empowerment of women can be defined as a process of awareness, capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision making power and control leading to transformative action. Hence, it can be viewed as a means for creating a social environment where one can take decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for desirable social change, creating strength and innate

ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience.

Historical Review of Status of Indian Women: India is a land of varied customs and cultures blended harmoniously to form a composite land. India is a country of great diversity having different customs and traditions, caste and class hierarchies. After all its patriarchal nature has created male and female dichotomy into two polar opposites and never allows women to enjoy equal rights and opportunities like their male counterparts in different spheres of life. Women's empowerment in India has a long and rich history. The position of women in Indian society is the true index of its socio-cultural attainment. In the Rig Vedic age, women enjoyed a high position in Indian society. They had full freedom for spiritual and intellectual development. GargiVachaspati was one such distinguished woman of the era. Vedic literature has references, which recommend the assurance of the birth of a scholarly daughter. Daughters like sons were initiated into Vedic studies and had to lead a life devoted to learning self-control and discipline. Many women rose to become Vedic scholars, orators, poets and teachers. Some remained unmarried for a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and were called Brahmanavadinies. Women married at a mature age and were equal partners of their husbands in the performance of spiritual and temporal duties. They were free to attend public assemblies and were active participants in social activities.

However, as society grew complex, the 'four-vama system' based on occupation was replaced by the vama system based on birth. In the process, the status of women was reduced to that of shudras. Women ceased to be economically productive and their position became secondary. As taboos concerning smell and touch crystalised, women were forbidden to participate in religious sacrifices during periods of menstruation, confinement and child bearing, as they were considered unclean and untouchable. The Smriti writers like Manu, Yagnavalkya were issued mandates to discontinue the practice of Upanyas for daughters, which adversely affected women's education. Characterising them as emotional and temperamental, Manu propounded the theory of the perpetual tutelage of women, along with other social taboos resulting in inhuman customs. The emergence of feudalism in around the fourth century relegated the status of women to that of property. With the advent of Islam in India, the status of women assumed a new form, as by that time, the males of the community had started interpreting Islamic injunctions selectively to suit patriarchal needs. Notwithstanding this, Queens Raziya Sultana and Nurjahan played a key role in shaping medieval Indian politics. With the advent of the British rule, a unique fusion of western and eastern thought took place. India came in contact with the modern west, where a far-reaching transformation had taken place in politics, economic and cultural spheres, giving impetus to a rethinking of

values. Indian socio-religious reformers, who launched a campaign against social evils, especially relating to the treatment of women, took up a challenge to expunge child marriage, female infanticide, purdah system, sati, subjugation of widows, etc. In this direction, some Christian missionaries tried to persuade British government to abandon the policy of neutrality in social issues of Indians and legislate against the evil social customs. The idea of imparting education to Indian women by establishing exclusive schools for them originated from missionaries in 1819. English education opened a whole new world to Indian women, a world of social purposes, coloured by the ideals of liberalism, humanism, liberty and equality. The British government under William Bentick, abolished sati in 1829, later female infanticide was banned, and in 1856, the Widow Remarriage Act was passed. Ironically, it was men and not women, who initially took up the cause of women's empowerment in India. The forerunners in this field were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi; Keshab Chandra Sen, MG Ranade, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand, Virsalingam Pantulu, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and M K Gandhi. Thus, it was clear that national progress could not be achieved without the progress of women. Although men were first to take up the cause of women, the latter came up closely behind and organised themselves to work for their emancipation. There are varied socio-cultural and political forces under which groups of women organized themselves for collective resistances against such violations of women's rights and dignity. Women organisations act as pressure group, as they act in response to it and within it. The chief women to lead the nascent women's movement were Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Ramabai Ranade who presided over the Arya Mahila Samaj (1862-1924), Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887), Francina Sorabjee, Annie Jagannathan and Rukmabai. Albeit they were unable to completely emancipate and empower Indian women, they did succeed in sowing the seeds of the women's movement in India.

Women Empowerment in National and International Context: Women constitute almost 50 per cent of the world's population. Women all over the world are challenged by a number of obstacles that restrict their ability to play significant roles in their communities and the broader society. For a long time they have lagged far behind men in key socio-economic indicators that place them at a huge disadvantage. Two thirds of the 774 million adult illiterates worldwide are women, the same proportion for the past 20 years and across most regions, according to the United Nations' World's Women 2010: Women's rights are human rights" was first declared in the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in the year 1993. The Conference also established that any neglect of human rights is a human rights violation and drew attention to the relationship between gender and human rights

violation. Human rights of women generally include non-discrimination on the ground of sex, freedom from poverty, sustainable economic and social development, full and equal participation of women in power and decision-making. Though women possess immense potential to bring social transformation in the society they are generally not allowed to play major role in the corridor of power and influence which is generally vested with their male counterparts. Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD- 1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked to *Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion* 201 safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that for reservation of seats (33%), whereas the report HRD as March 2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Finland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India "The New Panchayati Raj" is the part of the effort to empower women at least at the village level. The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. These are CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. The year of 2001 was observed as the year of women's empowerment. During the year, a landmark document has been adopted, 'the National Policy for the empowerment of women.' For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IME) etc. The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there are total 20, 56, 882 laces Gaonpanchayat members, out of this women members is 8, 38, 244 (40.48%), while total Anchalikpanchayat

members is 1, 09, 324, out of this wo

Post Independence Initiatives for Women's Development and Empowerment: A significant change has taken place in women's life after independence. This has, firstly due to planned and comparatively rapid industrial development, and secondly, because of the acquisition of new political rights through adult franchise. After independence of India, the main thrust of development is to bring necessary changes in the community through various development interventions and involvement of common men in the regional planning and development through adopting participatory rural appraisal methods. In 1970s and 1980s there was country wide protest on issues relating to violence against women. Numerous women's groups took up issues like dowry deaths, bride burning, rape, *sati* and focused on. They stressed upon sexual oppression of women. The patriarchy was thoroughly challenged and the underlying women's role in the private as well public spheres is given utmost importance.

Women's Development in Different Five Year Plans

Under different five year plans women welfare programmes were taken up for improving the status of women. During first five year plan (1951-56) Central Social Welfare Board was set up in 1953 for undertaking welfare measures for women. In the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) stressed upon overall approach for intensive agricultural development and women's welfare approach still continued. The plan recognized the need for organization of women as workers and stated that women's should avail maternity benefits and crèches for children and protected against hazardous works. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) stressed upon women's education as a major welfare strategy for development of women. The healthcare services for women mainly concentrated upon maternity and child welfare, health education, nutrition and family planning. The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) also emphasized women's education. The basic policy was to promote women's welfare within the family. The family planning was stepped up to reduce birth rate from 40-25 per thousand through mass education in order to control population growth. High priority was given to immunization of pre-school children and supplementary feeding for children, expectant and nursing mothers.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) stated the need for train women for generating income. The plan recommended functional literacy programme to equip women with skills and knowledge even in performing household tasks like nutrition, child care, healthcare and household economy. plan coincided with the International Women's Decade and submission of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). The overall status of the CSWI was to undertake a comprehensive examination of all the questions relating to the right and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions

in the country and problems relating to the advancement of women. In 1977-78 the Government appointed the Working Group on Employment of Women and for the first time there was a shift from welfare to development approaches for women. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1979-85) recognized that women's development is obstructed mainly due to their lack of access to resources. So during this plan, a variety of programmes were lunched in different development sectors in order to raise the socio-economic status of women. The programme for distributing joint pattas was initiated during this period for active involvement of women in distribution of land, transfer of assets and house sites along with their male counterparts. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) got high priority which cover 7per cent of women beneficiaries during this plan. A new scheme namely Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was started in 1982-83 as a pilot project in fifty blocks of the country. In order to encourage elementary and higher education of girls a centrally sponsored scheme was lunched for providing financial assistance in educationally backward states for establishing non formal education centers exclusively for girls. To boost up early childhood education centres for children within the age group of three to six years were set up adjacent to primary schools in rural and backward areas. Functional Literacy programme for Adult Women was implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare to impart education to women in the field of health and nutrition, child care and family planning. In order to raise health and nutritional status of women of most vulnerable and weaker sections, the pregnant women and nursing mothers were provided special nutrition under Integrated Child Development Programme (ICDS). Under the scheme of Assistance to women in distress the destitute and needy women were given vocational courses in non-traditional trades in order to make them economically self-sufficient. The role of media and voluntary action was increasingly realized to draw public opinions through highlighting the socio-economic problems faced by women, atrocities against women role of women in development process.

The Year 2001 was celebrated as the 'Year of Women's Empowerment'. Efforts have already been on for preparing a Gender Development Index to assess the impact of various policies and programmes in improving the status of women at regular intervals. Besides formulating policies and programmes, enacts/amends legislation concerning women; and reviews, guides and coordinate efforts of both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, the nodal Department also implements a few innovative programmes. They include employment and income generation; welfare and support services; awareness generation and gender sensitization; and other enabling measures which, play the role of complementary to the other general development efforts for women. Indira

MahilaYojana (IMY), launched in 1995-96 was recast and retitled as 'Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme (IWEP)' in 2001 to empower women through the following -i) generate awareness amongst women by disseminating information and knowledge; ii) help women achieve economic strength through micro-level income-generating activities; and iii) establish convergence of various services such as literacy, health, non-formal education, rural development, water supply, training for capacity building, entrepreneurship, etc. Merged with the programme of MahilaSamridhiYojana, IWEP will be an effective instrument for empowering women, both socially and economically, besides organising them into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to form a strong institutional base. RashtriyaMahilaKosh (RMK) is a national-level mechanism to meet the micro- credit needs of poor and asset-less women in the Informal Sector. Now day's microfinance has emerged as a powerful instrument for improving the livelihood and poverty alleviation especially among women community.

The Tenth Five Year Plan(2002-2007) emphasized on women component plan (WCP) and gender budgeting which are complementary to each other to secure women's interest all over the world. Various measures had been taken in order to eradication of atrocities against women and girls on India which include setting up of women's police station, family court, mahila court, legal aid centre etc and conducting awareness programmes of women's rights, legal literacy etc. The Eleventh plan approach paper (2007-2012) says about to change all that creating an enabling environment for women to become economically, politically and socially empowered. The government has constituted a committee of feminist economist to ensure gender sensitive allocation of public resources in the 11th five years plan, a step it hopes will promote gender equality and more inclusive growth. This plan entitled as „faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth“ gave more attention on women's cause. The 12th five year plan of the Government of India (2012-2017) in addition to reserving a certain percentage of jobs for single women under centrally sponsored schemes, the plan has proposed promoting and strengthening federations of single women at the block and district level. A very large proportion of women in rural India are either wholly or significantly dependent on their livelihood on farm activity be it crop agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry or fisheries. Women participation in agriculture and in animal husbandry In framing policies/schemes for th 12th five year plan, the special needs of women must be taken due care of. The MahilaKisanSahakatikaranPariyojana (MKSP) which is a sub-component of NRLM (National Rural Health Mission) was recently launched to meet the specific attention needs to be given to leverage the enormous potential of empowering rural women in the farm sector. The neo-liberal policies have widening the gap between the rich and the poor, with the poorest of the

poor being women. Wage disparities should be removed. Proper implementation of wage act should be ensured. Minimum Wages Act as well as the Equal Remuneration Act must be implemented. The focus is on the following four key aspects of the 12th five year plan viz., health, education, urbanization, governance. In a nutshell, reproductive healthcare remains a significant challenge that needs attention. Schemes like JananiSurakshaYojana (JSY) should be made with regard to education, there are multiple factor that hinder women and girls from developing their full potentials-lack of income, unsafe-environment in the schools, curriculum not attuned to women's needs etc. Gender studies should be incorporated into the academic curriculum. Committees against sexual harassment should be formed in schools and workplaces. In case of urbanization, there should be inclusion of women representatives in urban local bodies. While steps have already been taken for grassroots democracy by reserving seats, the de-facto impact on women's decision making must be revealed. Apart from that all women representatives must be treated as equal to their male counterparts by the local administration.

In India, the female male literacy rate for 15 to 24 years increased to 0.80 in 2001 from 0.67 per cent in 1991. NSS 2007-08 results show that literates in the age group of 15-24 years at all India level constitute 86 per cent with 91 per cent among male and 80 per cent among female. Thus the ratio of literate women to men in the age group of 15-24 years stands at 0.88 in 2007-08. The ratio of literate men to women in the age group of 15 to 24 years stands at 0.88 in 2007-08. The ratio of literate women to men in the age group of 15-24 years tends to exceed 1 by 2015, implying reaching a state of gender disparity against male youth in literacy by 2015. This attainment along with attainment of gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education can be a major gain for women in acquiring access to wider world of learning and development of skills, economic independence, authority of decision making and self determination. Similarly, the rate of change over time in respect of the share of women in wage employment in non agricultural sector is slow. As per NSS 66th round the percentage share of female in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector as 18.6 per cent with rural 17.9 per cent and urban 19.2 per cent during 2004-05.

As per the latest Human Development Report (2010), India's position in the Human Development Index (HDI) scale is equivalent to the South Asian Average and is better than the Sub-Saharan Africa's average where HDI is 0.389. In South Asia India stood third behind Sri Lanka and Maldives. Sri Lanka had a HDI of 0.658 the highest in South Asia. Among BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) India appears at the bottom. This is partly due to the fact that the rest of the BRIC group has had middle income country level GDP per capita for some time, India become a low middle income country only recently. In addition, India's health and education indicators have also been historically much

lower than the other BRIC countries. On the other hand, Gender Development Index accounts for inequalities between men and women in the same dimensions as those of HDI. It is a gender sensitive HDI –the higher the gender inequality the lower the GDI. As calculated by Ministry of Women and Child Development Department, Govt of India the all India GDI for 2006 was 0.590 compared to 0.514 in 1996. The HDI for the same year was 0.605 and 0.530 respectively. This shows that the loss in HDI on account of gender inequalities (which is the difference between HDI and GDI) has increased over the decade, only marginally. The major women's human rights instruments are United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) and the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), Millennium Development Goals are the major milestones in addressing the rights and priorities of women in international sphere.

Different Levels of Women Empowerment : One can relate empowerment at three levels: empowerment on the individual, group, and societal/ community- level and the interaction between these. The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal. The group level deals with the collective action and sense of agency that woman experience together, in a group. The societal level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do, how women should behave etc. The different levels are seen as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal level. Women who are empowered on an individual level will most likely go on and affect the other levels. Empowerment on a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self esteem and sense of agency. At individual level empowerment of women is generally measured in terms of three major indicators: education, employment and intra-household decision-making power. It includes power relations which exist at multiple levels from family-community-state within which the tribal women interact and involves their ability to assert their own psychologies (constructed by gender roles) assigned to them within cultural setting. Though, the women have low educational status they work harder to contribute to the family economy and management and also take part in decision making process in the family. The women are generally more illiterate than men. The low enrolment rates of rural girls in the schools reflect their lower literacy status. In addition to this they also face numerous problems relating reproductive health and other health complications and genetic disorders. The

women in rural areas have higher infant mortality rate; higher fertility rate, low nutritional level and low life-expectancy. The women empowerment need to be Holistic in its approach (political, social and economic), universal (equal opportunity in all fields), participative (in decision making) and inclusive (broad based). So the process of empowering women should necessarily bring down the discrimination and atrocities against common women so that every woman would have the strength and courage to stand up for their own rights and privileges. The women in the 21st Century have all right to enjoy and exercise Right to information, Right to development, Right to choose which also includes freedom from fear and freedom from torture.

The approaches for empowerment of women can be divided into three broad heads.

- i.) Socio-Cultural Empowerment of Women
- ii) Economic Empowerment of Women
- iii) Civil and Political Empowerment of Women

Socio-Cultural Empowerment of Women
Women are educated about the developmental benefits including awareness about the existing social problems in the society, recognition of their image in the family and community, role in making important decision in their family, plan and promote better education for their children, taking care of health of the aged and the children just to mention a few. Women are also allowed to participate in political and public life. Therefore, they are given a chance to serve the community including fighting for the basics amenities & welfare needs of the village community such as: Safe drinking water, Public sanitation, Electricity Provision, Chance to help weaker people disabled and aged

Empowering Indian Women Through Education:

Education is an important tool to empower women through providing right kind of choice in life and it has been instrumental in defining and mapping the individual aims and objectives. Education is central to the process of development of any individual or nation. The development of any nation will not be complete and fruitful without developing women literacy especially among the weaker and deprived section of the society. Increase in women literacy has tremendous positive effects on their lifestyle at the familial level and societal level too. In this context, UNESCO points out that literacy among women can be instrumental in people's achievements of a range of capabilities, such as maintaining good health and living longer, controlling reproductive behavior, raising healthy children and educating them (UNESCO 2006). Education has the potentiality for creating awareness of problems and difficulties and provides suitable means to solve problems like poverty and inequality and pave the means for improving the quality of life and climbing the ladder of social hierarchy. While exploring the present state of affairs, it is observed that though tribal literacy rate has increased by 17.5 per cent from 1991 to 2001, the male-female gap in literacy rate has also increased from 22 to 24 per cent. Most women are given a chance of

finishing their education to the degree level. They are discouraged from getting married and raising a family when they are young. There are number of women education grants that offer help to women from poor background in order to give them a chance to be educated. There're various scholarships that benefits women in India to achieve their career by going back to school or various training institutions where they can further their education. Also, many NGO's in India offer support to women in order to benefit them in education. The government of India is also setting aside funds that are used to empower women & other initiatives that will empower them. Women who have the desire to improve their lives are allowed to take these grants from the government and NGO's to empower themselves with the help of their spouses or without for single mothers to get education to the degree level, post graduates, PHD just to mention a few. These grants for women get most supports from different companies after realizing that women can perform better than men if they are well educated and equipped. Health is a necessary pre-requisite for human development and progress. It is essentially concerned with the well being of common human being including men and women. The widespread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water and sanitary living conditions, genetic disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, nutritional status, forest ecology, low life expectancy, poor maternal and child health services and ineffective coverage of national health and nutritional services are possible contributing factors to dismal health conditions. Malnutrition is quite common among rural womenfolk where there is high prevalence of nutritional deficiency among population among all social groups around 68.5 per cent of women are highly anemic in comparison to 39.6 per cent of men.

Reproductive health: Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a major – but preventable -- cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.

Stewardship of natural resources: Women in developing nations are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources. The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of

discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

Economic Empowerment of Women: Poverty is defined as the total per capita expenditure of the lowest expenditure class, which is consumed 2400 kcal/day in rural and 2100kcal/day in urban areas with an attempt to provide comprehensive package of essential goods and services to the people below poverty line. The incidence of poverty is significantly higher in the rural and tribal areas i.e 52 per cent in the year 1993-94 which has been decreased to 46 per cent in 1999-2000 as against 27 per cent for all population. The highest percentage of Scheduled Tribe population live below poverty line is found in the rural areas. Similarly, in the urban area poverty is 41 percent among tribes in the year 41 per cent which has been decreased to 34 per cent in 1999-2000. While the incidence of poverty has declined over time in India in recent years, in case of rural STs, the incidence of poverty is much higher than the national aggregate by 19.4 per cent (HDR,2011) Around 60 per cent STs in rural areas live on an expenditure of less than Rs 14 incurred per day per person which indicates that the incidence of poverty in rural India is much higher. Employment as a source of empowerment of women also reflects their control over own income and earnings. In respect of migration, most of the migration is intra-district which took place from one rural area to another rural area of the same district. Maximum migration took place due to marriage (71.6 per cent) or due to migration of the parent or earning member of the family (9.5 per cent) or in search of better employment (4.5 per cent). The female migration was around 9 times than that of the male population in rural areas and two times in the urban areas.

Civil and Political Empowerment of Women: Another aspect which needs to be stressed upon is that, in the traditional value-oriented tribal society, the womenfolk generally have low level of socio-political awareness. Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. In the present day general women are not fully free from dependency on men in exercising their political rights which is an important factor responsible for lack of women leadership in the tribal society. The 73rd Amendment of Indian Constitution has prescribed 33 per cent reservation for women in the Indian Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies which is a major turning point in the quest for gender equality in politics. Introduction of gender quotas has not only increased self-esteem, confidence and motivation of women but also strengthen women's interactions with the political representatives, decision making rights which ultimately increase political empowerment of women. "However, the position of empowerment of women in the Panchayati Raj system as it actually stands are probably not entirely encouraging. There still exists

wide gap between the ideals and goals enunciated in the constitution, legislative policies, plans, programmes and other mechanisms adopted on the one hand and the reality of status of women in our country on the other. There is wide disparity manifested in various forms is clear when we look to some of the issues that affect the cause of women in our society. Continuous decline in the female ratio in the population, violence against women both in domestic and societal levels, discriminations against girl children and adolescent girls, crime of female foeticide by misuse of modern technology etc. are a few of several constraints that the womenfolk are confronted with which directly or indirectly contribute to their retarding progress in empowerment particularly while discharging as proud representatives of the people at the grass root level." (Patnaik, 2008) In this context the situation faced by the tribal women is most challenging. They have not been asserting their political rights and opportunities to the extent which they have been struggling for socio-economic rights like rights to work and right of inheritance etc. There has been no craze in the struggle for women's political rights in pursuit of political empowerment of women.

Conclusion: Democracy is based on the principle of equality and social justice. According to Anne Phillips "Democracy is never just a system for organizing the election of government. It also brings with it a strong conviction about the citizens being of intrinsically equal worth". Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and acting head of UN Women pledged that India should become a democracy for women. The progress has been made by women in India but it still lacks the critical mass of women representation in the Parliament. She also pointed that economic inequality and gender inequality are the stumbling block in the way of women's development.

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