

## CHAPTER - VI

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Though conclusions arrived at have been discussed at appropriate places, yet at the cost of some repetition, these are being presented in this chapter.

The standard of culture of any age of a nation could be assessed from the status of women. In Vedic age, the status of women was of equality, honorable and respectable. They were educated in various disciplines of knowledge such as astrology, geography, veterinary sciences and even in martial arts. There were instances of women taking part in wars and fights. They were highly respected within and outside home. Gradually due to several socio-political changes, especially during the middle age, the glorious status of women declined. Manu considered her a drudge in the house-hold, a log for her lord's pleasure and she became a child bearing machine. With the advent of Muslims in India, her status further deteriorated. Many restrictions were imposed upon Hindu woman. Many social evils like child marriage and dowry system surfaced and started to engulf women. Due to the insecurity and uncertainty with regard to her chastity, Purdah became more rigid. Female infanticide was practiced during this period.

The position enjoyed by women in the Rig- Vedic period deteriorated in the later Vedic civilization. Women were denied the right to education and widow remarriage. They were denied the right of inheritance and ownership of property.

The Bhakti period tried to improve the status of women by discarding purdah, shunning traditional rigidity and delivered the

message of equality. But the impact was short lived. Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhs also preached the message of equality between men and women. Other Sikh Gurus also preached against the discrimination against women.

The improvement in the status of women started getting momentum during the British Raj, when social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Jyotirao Phule and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar initiated for the empowerment of women and made selfless efforts to create awareness among women about their status and were quite successful in removing various social evils. Their efforts led to abolition of child marriage, Sati and enactment of the Widow Remarriage Act. They also encouraged widow remarriage and women education and were successful in creating a base for development of women and their strive for equality. Later, stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru advocated women rights. As a result of their concentrated efforts the status of women in social, economical and political life began to elevate in the Indian society.

Gender inequality in India can be traced back to the historic days of Mahabharata when Draupadi was put on the dice by her husband as a commodity. In Indian society, a female had always been dependent on male members of the family. This practice is still in vogue to a larger extent. As a widow her dependence on male members of the family still prevails and in many social activities she is not permitted to mix with other members of the family. She has very little share in political, social and economic life of the society.

In India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social, political, or economic participation,

access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the country though few women are engaged in services and other activities. They need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. On the other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, out of every 1000 females, 542 females were literates (54.2 percent). This shows that 45.8 percent females were still illiterates in India. In comparison with the male literacy rate, the female literacy rate has always been lower. The total work participation rate of women in 2001 was 25.68 percent and it includes in itself 13.45 percent of rural women and 11.55 percent of urban women. 71.8 percent of the women employed were in primary sector, 21.7 percent in tertiary sector and the remaining in the manufacturing sector. These statistics show that literacy rate and work participation rate of women are increasing day by day but at a very slow pace. Female literacy rate has never been equal to male literacy rate.

From womb to tomb, the story of Indian women is one of discrimination, oppression, atrocities and neglect. Through the selective birth she becomes prey to foeticide. Female infanticide is increasing at an alarming rate because the girl child is considered to be a burden to the family. Workplace harassment of women is another phenomenon which is rapidly increasing as more women join the workforce. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity.

Gender disparity is high, crimes against women are increasing and violence against women is all time high and in most cases go unreported.

Dowry related problems and death is increasing and is profoundly manifesting in the urban population. Early age marriages are still taking place in large numbers and the number of girls going to school is abysmally low. Moreover majority of the girls who join the school drop out by the age of puberty to get married and live a life of drudgery. All this is happening despite the fact that there are number of programmes and policy initiatives that is being run by the government and other bodies.

Empowerment may be understood as enabling people, especially women to acquire and possess power resources, in order to make decision on their own or resist decisions that are made by others that affect them. Empowerment is only effective answer to oppression, exploitation, injustice, and other melodies of society. The idea of empowerment contains exciting possibilities and emphasizes on the building of economic and social capabilities among individuals, classes and communities. Empowerment appears to be an alternative path for dismantling the old structure and putting new one in this place. Empowerment is to change the society through re-arrangement of the power. Empowerment is both a means to an end and an end in itself. So there is a need for empowerment through civic, political and social transformation of women.

The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender based discrimination. 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.

Women empowerment is a subject of debate. At earlier time they were enjoying equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. Since the days of national movement in India, their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. After independence of India, the framers of the Constitution and national leaders have strongly demanded equal position of women with men. Today women occupy respectable positions in all walks of life. Yet, they have not been absolutely free from some discrimination and harassment of the society.

As far as India is concerned, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and finds a place in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the States to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to equality. Article 15(1) of the Constitution explicitly states that the State shall not discriminate on the ground of sex, among others. Sub-clause (3) of the Article goes a step further to establish substantive equality, allowing the State to enact "special measures" for women and children. Hence, the concept of affirmative action in recognition of the historical disadvantage faced by women is firmly entrenched in our constitutional scheme. The women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions.

Providing social justice and social security for women has been the focus of our policy makers and their earnest efforts have resulted in empowering women through provision of her justified rights in Indian society. Many Legislative Acts have been passed by successive legislatures in India to remove social inequalities between men and women. The Hindu Marriage Act made bigamy amongst Hindus as illegal and void. The Act has also brought in the concept of re-marriage and divorce amongst Hindu women. The Women's Right to Property Act 1956 and Hindu Succession Act 1956 have enlarged her rights and now widow becomes an absolute owner to dispose of property at will. The Act recognizes Hindu women as legal heir of her husband, her son and her father providing equal share to women in property. The Hindu Adoption Act allows a woman, whether married, or unmarried to adopt a child. The Dowry Prohibition Act and provisions of Indian Penal Code help in checking crime against women irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The Criminal Law (II Amendment Act 1983) provides crucial amendments concerning women in India Penal Code. The government conceded the demand of women to establish family courts for speedy conduct of matrimonial disputes. Even the latest 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1994) has reserved 33 percent of seats in Municipal and Panchayat bodies for women. The 84th Constitutional Amendment Bill provides for 33 percent reservation for women in legislatures.

Development of women has been a policy objective of the government since independence. Until the 70s the concept of women's development was mainly welfare oriented. In 1970s, there was a shift from welfare approach to development approach that recognized the mutually reinforcing nature of the process of development. In the 80s a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted with an emphasis on three core

areas of health, education and employment. Women were given priorities in all the sectors including SSI sector. Government and non government bodies have paid increasing attention to women's economic contribution through self employment and industrial ventures.

The Government has come up with several schemes from time to time to enhance the role and contribution of women , such as, National Rural Health Mission (2005 – 06), National Horticulture Mission (2005 – 06), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (2005 – 06), Janani Suraksha Yojana (2006 – 07), Total Sanitation Campaign, Mid Day Meal (2008 – 09), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme (2008 – 09) and National Rural Livelihood Mission (2010 – 11) have been expanded in the recent past, and better results could be awaited in the years to come. All these schemes address one or the other aspect of nutrition. While the ICDS scheme continues to cater to the supplementary nutritional needs of children below six years and pregnant and lactating mothers, and the Mid- day Meal scheme takes care of the school going children (6-14 years), the recently introduced Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), namely, SABLA would provide a package of services including health and nutrition to adolescent girls in the age group of 11- 14 years for out of school girls and 15-18 years for all girls for nutrition in 200 districts as a pilot. Additionally, a new scheme, the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) would provide a better enabling environment for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers and support for providing early and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. *Mahila Samakhya Programme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV), and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL).* Also a *Nirbhaya* scheme

was started in the union budget in 2013 to support initiatives by the government and NGOs working towards protecting the dignity and ensuring safety of women in India.

It has been observed with concern that despite various constitutional provisions, enactments, international legal documents and institutional bodies working to provide equality and justice to women, the condition of women is still very dismal.

### **Constraints**

There are several constraints that hinder the process of women empowerment in India.

\* The social factors, such as, illiteracy, ignorance, the economic factors such as low wage, unemployment under employment and political factors such as, low participation of women in the elections and other elected bodies are also equally responsible for gender inequality in the country.

\*\* Social norms and family structures particularly in India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of such norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child. The hold of this preference has strengthened rather than weakened as is evident from the falling sex ratio. The sex ratio is very low in India as compared to many developing countries and most of the advanced countries. The high maternal mortality, infant mortality, child mortality foeticide, infanticide, abortion, low age of marriage social stigma associated with marriage, son preference are responsible for low sex ratio in India.



\*\*\* The personal laws of different religions directly affect women's lives and status. The main characteristic of all these personal laws is that they are anti-women and blatantly discriminatory. For example practice of triple *talaq* and polygamy in Muslim personal law has undermined severally the dignity and the status of women.

\*\*\*\* Various customs and traditions prevalent in our society like *Sati*, *Devadasi*, Dowry etc are also contributing in lowering the status of women and violating the human rights of women.

\*\*\*\*\* Old and sick rituals and customs, socio-religious norms are also responsible for the inferior position of women. They are prejudiced by religious attitude to secure spiritual benefit by son for the purpose of offering funeral cakes and perpetuate father's name. So no more expectations are associated with her. In Indian society, a big segment of women are still unconscious of their own rights.

\*\*\*\*\* Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women are not aware of their legal rights. Even women who are aware lack the courage to take the legal step. The legislation which affects women most is their situation in marriage and inheritance. As far as the rights of inheritance are concerned, women generally do not try to inherit land left by their parents if brothers are alive. The traditional belief that land should not go outside the patriarchal family operates.

\*\*\*\*\* One of the major challenges of women empowerment in India is to change the attitude of society towards women. The problem in India is that the society never worked on the premise of gender equality

since a long-long time. In Indian society, atrocities and discrimination against women is a way of daily life. There is an attitude which still prevails in India where women are considered to be only worthwhile of household activities and managing the children. The veil system, child marriage and dowry are testimonies to this fact. Women have never been part of the mainstream society in India and they are still considered as a great liability.

\*\*\*\*\* In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political participation. The women's reservation policy bill is however a very sad story as it was presented five times in a period of 18 years and repeatedly scuttled in the parliament. In the Panchayati Raj system, however, women have been given representation as a sign of political empowerment. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women's empowerment still has a long way to go and may even have become more difficult in the recent years.

In nutshell, it can be said that hurried legislation without public support, insufficient law enforcers, investigators and prosecutors, deleterious judicial system, ill conceived policies of government, faulty educational system are the major obstacles in the way of improving women's position. Thus, due to plethora of progressive and protective legislations favouring women, we failed in our aims to uplift the social status of woman and place her on par with male in all walks of life.

### **Suggestion**

Some important suggestion to empower women are as follows:

\* Illiteracy remains the greatest barriers to any improvement in the position of women. It is suggested that illiterate women should be

educated first. This is possible only through introduction of non-formal education and it should be taken to their door-steps by means of Adult Education Centres, Night Schools and the like. It is necessary to educate girls encouraging them to be independent and fight for their own rights. Education will give them a sense of independence and will help them become self-reliant. The need of the hour is to improve female literacy as education holds the key to development.

\*\* It is necessary to build social awareness and to change the mindset of people towards women. This would change the attitude of people towards women and they will not be treated as parasites on the society. As far as widows are concerned the social mind-set has also to be changed in the sense that widowers should marry widows rather than marrying unmarried girls or only childless widows. None of the reforms contemplated by various legislations enacted for the benefit of widows can achieve success unless and until the mindset of the society is changed.

\*\*\*The status of women would not change much; unless the women themselves come forward for the cause. It is evident from the prevailing situation that lack of education, economic dependence and existing mind-set of the men folk are the main hurdles for the society to accept this underlying concept of equality and justice for women.

Therefore, the men must rise to the occasion in good and healthy spirit. They must recognize and accept the fact that women are equal partners in life have their own identity. It is relevant to bring out that over the centuries of human civilization, gender roles had been based on the stereotype conceptions of feminine and masculine characteristics.

\*\*\*\* For the purpose of imparting legal knowledge it is suggested that legal aid and legal illiteracy camps should be conducted in the villages and backward areas. The task of imparting legal knowledge should be entrusted to local bodies or voluntary organizations, as the role of voluntary organizations is very crucial in such fields of service.

\*\*\*\*\* To improve the position of women, it is suggested that all Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution related to women should be made fundamental rights, so as to be enforceable in the court of law. Then only, it is possible to get the benefits, provided for women under various labour laws, such as, Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act and Maternity Benefit Act.

\*\*\*\*\* Women's full participation in all decision making processes at the highest level is essential and inevitable. For women's greatest participation in political field, it should be the endeavor of all the political parties and especially the ruling party to give party tickets to a proportional number of women for elections at national, state and districts levels and see that they are elected to the highest decision making bodies. The central and state governments should give proportional representation to women in the cabinet and also on administrative and executive posts. Without providing equal opportunities to women for taking decisions, the vicious circle cannot be broken.

\*\*\*\*\* Women social organizations are to be established who can help the women in protecting their rights. Not only this, a coordinated effort of the government together-with those of voluntary agencies, law enforcing agencies, judiciary and general public is highly essential to achieve the desired results.

\*\*\*\*\* Vocational training centres for female workers be established to equip them for skilled work. Schemes should also be made and enforced effectively for proper technical training for women to enable them to acquire skills. Such schemes will be helpful in economic empowerment of women.

\*\*\*\*\* Lastly, laws should be implemented in true spirit and more effectively.

To conclude, it could be said that women empowerment in India is a challenging task as gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in many forms since centuries. There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost all the fields but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male dominated society.

Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation on the other hand just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in India is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development.

The women of India are disempowered relative to men in respect of decision making power, freedom of movement, education, employment, exposure to media, political participation etc. and face domestic violence to a considerable degree and occupy the subordinate status both at home and in the society even in the 21st century.

Although India still has to go a long way in attaining gender equality and gender justice, no one can deny that India's' efforts towards redressing gender inequality are much more pronounced than in many other countries.