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A Conceptual Study on Women Empowerment-Facts and Realities

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Abstract: *India with its diversity and rich heritage has an ugly side to it. If women have been worshipped as Goddess, there has been "sati" too. A silent witness, the oppressed women have come a long way. Though the situation has improved some facts (education rate, sexual harassment among others) are daunting. Many women have broken the barriers and we would still witness a lot more. To help women is to help society. And through this journey of women empowerment our nation will achieve its dream. The dream of reviving its past glory .To become the "golden peacock" again .Since 1911, the March 8th is celebrated around the world as International Women's Day. Many groups around the world choose different themes each year relevant to global and local gender issues. The UN declared an International Women's Day theme for 2013 and it is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women". And this is very crucial for India. Empowerment of any section of a society is a myth until they are conferred equality before law. The foundation of freedom, justice and fraternity is based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights to all the members of the society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948, envisaged in Article 2 that "every one is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind."*

Keywords: *Empowerment, Gender equality, Women right, Development, Education, Independence, nation, laws, participation, discrimination, India, UNDP,*

I. Introduction:

Empowerment is defined as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them Empowerment of women is the prerequisite to transform a developing country into a developed country. Women empowerment generally has five components : firstly, women's sense of self worth; secondly, their right to have the power of control their own lives, both within and outside home; and lastly, their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a just social and economic order nationally, internationally and universally. Educational attainment and economic participation are they key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society. Other than educational and economic empowerment, changes in women's mobility and social interaction and changes in intra-household decision-making are necessary. They equal to men in all aspects. Women are more perfectionists in the power to create, nurture and transform. Today, women are emerging as leaders in growing range of fields. Be it aeronautics, medicine, space, engineering, law, politics, education, business one can just name the profession and they are there, all that needed in today's world in their empowerment. In India, the empowerment process has already begun. We are now witnessing a steady improvement in the enrolment of women in schools, colleges and even in profession institutes. Twenty-six laws have been enacted so far to protect women from various crimes. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. Women have proved themselves as equals in many professions as well as proved themselves even better suited than men in some. The situation for the changing role of Women is improving fast. Women are educated; they have achieved great stature in all industries. Bureaucracy, sports, media, women have become a familiar sight. A modern woman has indeed risen above the past nations, about her inferior status. She fears no authoritative men, she strives to stand parallel to men and is independent. Education has given women enlightenment and a vision. They have realized that they aren't mere puppets in the society but a pillar without which the foundation of society is incomplete."It has traditionally been accepted that the thread of family weaves the fabric of Indian society. Women are considered as the hub centre of the family. Still, in the era of political domination by foreigners, the women in India suffered most. Women Empowerment is most vital system to strengthen the future of women in India. It is a systematic approach which needs to develop more seriously in India. The Government of India came up in the

new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women's Empowerment Year' to focus on a vision 'where women are equal partners like men'. This process has been further accelerated with some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious of their discrimination in several areas of family and public life. They are also in a position to mobilize themselves on issues that can affect their overall position. Empowerment would become more relevant if women are educated, better informed and can take rational decisions. A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality.

Why Empowerment:

For a balanced development, not only sociologically but also mathematically - as they constitute fifty percent of the human race, it is imperative that every section of the society develops equally and in harmony with each other. Be it the rich and influential or the not so rich. Therefore, it is important to harness the capabilities of women irrespective of the strata of society to which they belong. Unless society accepts gender equality as a fundamental principle of human existence all efforts will only partially bear results. Gender sensitisation and gender training is primary need of the hour. The struggle of gender equality should be carried at every level and it should overcome the barriers of caste, class, race and religion. We have to accept the fact that things are not going to change overnight but because of this we cannot stop taking action either. At this juncture the most important step is to initiate ground level actions however small it might seem. The ground level actions should be focussed towards changing the social attitude and practices prevalent in the society which are highly biased against women. This can be initiated by working with the women at the root level and focusing on increasing women's access and control over resources and increasing their control over decision making. Further working on the aspect of enhanced mobility and social interaction of women in the society would positively influence all round development and empowerment of women in India .

National Commission of women was created in 1992 and Convention of elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was ratified in 1993. Apart from the laws and policy formulations the violence against women can be only tackled through attitudinal change that need to take place in the family, in the society and the female members of the society as well. Only this attitudinal change and proactive action against violence by every single individual will help in galvanising the slumbering structures of the government and society towards further concrete steps and action. Today there are lot of things that is happening in the name of women empowerment in India and lot of resources are spent in this direction. Keeping this in mind it is crucial to have a reality check on what is happening on paper and what is the actual ground situation. It is worthwhile to ponder on the fact that we are one of the worst in terms of worldwide gender equality rankings .Women even today are not able to exercise full control over their circumstances or actions. From a welfare society at the inception, India moved on to embrace the developmental model and now the latest fad is the empowerment model. But with all these initiatives however genuine they might have been or they are, nothing substantial has happened on the ground.

Need For Women Empowerment:

In this contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. Now, it is time to forget that men are the only holders of power. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. The things are related to women's status and their future. However, I believe that Indian women are slowly getting empowerment in the sectors like education, politics, the work force and even more power within their own households. The worth of civilization can be arbitrated by the place given to women in the society. Today, women are busy running in the presidential campaign. The work force is covered with intellectual women who currently hold the CEO positions at large companies which were never held by Indian women in long ago. In our country, women have reached a long way eventually and have discovered a new path for them to come. Women rights are human rights. The concept of feminism is very vogue. Feminist usually deals out balky attention. Women's right and changes effort to win equality for women have containing women's suffrage, feminism, women's property rights, equal opportunity in work and education, and equal pay. Now, the future of women is seeking out. More, we have come across a more image of gender differences. Each year, we notice that the headline as "Girls outshine boys" in CBSE, ICSE and State Board results as well. It arrests us showing that girls are now more confident of getting better-paid professional jobs than their flagging male counterparts. Clearly, there is an excellent amount of reason for the girls to be more confident than boys and this is because of their remarkable academic feat around the nation. This achievement of girls is an absolute reversal of what would have been expected a generation ago. This is likely to steer to higher-income jobs. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Women play a distinct role in the economic development. She is the chief architect of family, the first teacher; supplier of labour power and by playing main role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. In the visible and invisible form women contribute for economic development. The nature has

given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women. She can create social, cultural and economic wonders. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. Socio-economic status of women labour is so poor. Women labourers in India are illiterates. Hence her status should be improved; she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of hidden potential power for the economic development. Often the women are victimized in the cases like rape, dowry harassments, sexual harassments, kidnapping etc. The verdicts of many of such cases go against women because of the non-availability of witness, discontinuation of suits, difficulty of proving the incidents etc. Therefore women should be empowered and strengthened. Teamwork by people is the key to eradicating this menace. People must come forward to help in rooting out such social evils. Law enforcing agencies cannot work alone. When the people are dynamic in their drive against crimes, the police cannot remain a mute spectator though they are supposed to be the protectors of citizens. They will be forced to dispense their bounden duties. Youth should be motivated to be socially responsible and protect women. This is the need of the hour. Everyone must think of changing society.

Empowerment And Economic Development:

Women empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. Discrimination against women is found in every culture and society in varying degrees. It is manifested in various domains of life and activity: economic, social, political and Religious. As a result of gender discrimination the status of women is subordinate to men and they have little access to education, food, nutrition, health care, employment and wages. Empowerment of women involves the improvement of their status in the family, community and society. It ensures women accessibility to modern development facilities and extends their participation in social, economic and political process and decision making. Empowerment is defined as the person capacity to make effective choices, that is as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. The extent or degree to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They were not allowed to own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and 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 the rights of women and to ensure that they get all the rights which men have or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women.

Empowerment If Ever Possible:

Women empowerment is understood as a very narrow term in today world. When we talk about women empowerment in India the most important aspect that comes into mind is the attitude of the society towards women. women are still considered as burden and liabilities and properties. These kind of attitudes give birth to the evil of violence against women. Women empowerment in India is not possible unless violence against women is eradicated from the society. Women's rights and issues have always been a subject of serious concern of academicians, intelligentsia and policy makers. The Women issues have received tremendous attention in the planning circle and in wide intellectual discussions and forums at national and global platforms. However the existing lacuna in the formulation and execution of the policies has not changed the grass root situation to a great extent. The continuity of changes in socio-economic and psycho-cultural aspects of human living has influenced the role of Women. With the process of Industrialization, Modernization and Globalization showing its deep impact on the human society all over the world, the role and responsibilities of Women has attained new definition and perspective. Further this has also led to addition of responsibilities and widened the role of Women who also shares the financial responsibilities. The Women rights are the means by which a dignified living is ensured thereby safeguarding her privileges. Thus the basic fundamental rights of speech, freedom and decision-making are her basic rights as an individual and citizen. The right for education and employment are significant for Women development and national development in the wider sense. The power and freedom to exercise these rights is Women empowerment. Women rights and empowerment are not independent of each other. The Women empowerment can only be facilitated only if she is able to exercise her right in the socio-economic spheres of decision-making. In last few years we have seen considerable improvement in women education in India. More and more women are coming out of houses and opt for education in India. That is the reason, why we are seeing lot of women on top positions in India. They have done considerable improvement in all areas. Today we see women in education, in government, in teaching, in research and in forces. Today they are the CEO's of top companies. They are running successful businesses. But here arises a question have the empowerment of woman resulted in any improvement in woman's real life. The answer is no to this question. Women are still under lot of discrimination in India, whether they are educated or not.

Problems Faced By Women:

Quite often there is some confusion when we use terms like "gender equality", "women's empowerment" and "female autonomy". While they may be used differently to suit the context, these are all essentially the order in which women are evolving in modern society today. The present century is witness to the highly patriarchal past of the human civilization. Women all over the world were oppressed, be it within the premises of their homes or outside. However, with the refinement of life and human race, some simmering of gender equality issues have emerged wherein, more and more women, as well as the governments are focusing on equality of women and their empowerment. By and large in the third world countries like India, women are more likely to be poor and illiterate as compared to men. Not only that, they are also often a victim of traditional biases that give them little or no rights to property ownership, lack of education, employment, medical care and control over their own destinies. They are also often the victims of acute domestic violence. In India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, economic opportunity and economic participation, political participation, access to education or access to nutrition and reproductive health care. A significant few in the society still consider women as sex objects. 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. Workplace harassment of women is another phenomenon which is rapidly increasing as more women join the workforce. 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. Female feticide and infanticide is starring the nation as one of the biggest social crisis. Majority of Women in India are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill equipped family and are not in a position to propel out themselves of the oppressive and regressive social and economic conditions. Female infanticide is one of the biggest crimes against humanity that is being carried out in India. The patriarchal system encourages a male child and considers women as a property or liability from the day she is born. An upsetting place still remains for Indian women is the negative sexual attention that women often receive. Indian societies have received notoriety for being unsafe for women. Whereby the fair sex is not only being hassled, stalked and raped but incidents of immoral trafficking also are very high. Add to this the heinous practice of female feticide and infanticide wherein nearly 10 million baby girls have been killed in the last twenty years alone. In fact, the level of atrocities against women is an indicator of the coercion of our society and underscores that we are a suppressed society. Clearly, safety is an obsolete word in today's India. It is the duty of law enforcement agencies to prevent crimes against women but they fail to solve this scourge alone. We need to accept the truth that there is a great discrepancy in the ideology and the actual practice of empowerment policy in India. Everything is happening at a very superficial level and the time has come to find out an actionable path at the ground level for real and measurable change. 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.

Efforts Made For Women Empowerment In India Before Independence

A few social reform measures were taken towards the later 19th and early 20th century during the British regime. The inception of Mahatma Gandhi in the National freedom movement ushered a new concept of mass mobilization. Women constituted about 50% of the country's total population, he, therefore, involved women in the nation's liberation movement. The mass participation of women directly in the freedom struggle was the great divide in the history of (Feminist movement) empowerment of women. They shed age-old disabilities and shared the responsibility of liberation of their motherland with their counter parts. The freedom of India thus became synonymous with the empowerment of women. In this context the date of India's political freedom (August 15, 1947) is a landmark in the history of women empowerment in India. It brought in its wake a great consciousness in our society for human dignity. It was realized that every citizen of independent India be accorded equal treatment under the law. Old practices against women continued during the British regime. But some reforms were made in relation with social justice and improving the status of women such as,

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy the founder of 'Brahma Samaj' succeeded in getting passed the Prevention of Sati Act in 1829 and raised voice against 'child marriage' and 'purdah' system.¹
- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar pleaded for widows' remarriage and educating women and succeeded in passing the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856.¹
- Maharshi Karve established Smt. Nandubai Damodar Thackersy University for Women (S.N.D.T) at Poona in 1916.¹
- Maharshi Dayanand Saraswathi started the "Arya Samaj" and advocated equal rights to women as in the Vedic period.¹

- Swami Vivekananda established “Shri Ramakrishna Mission” and gave importance to women education and self-dependence.¹

After Independence

After independence the status of women has changed. The political and cultural changes and independence of the country provided equal opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation by which the extent of exploitation of women came down. The year 1975 was declared as the year of International Women’s Year and the UNESCO also created awareness of the problems of women. The government of India has taken so many steps for providing equal status for women against men. In view of this the government declared the year 2001 as the “Year of Women’s Empowerment”. Government is trying to strengthen women from different dimensions. In 2001 the National Policy for Empowerment of Women and an action plan has also been adopted. The strategies of women empowerment include- social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice. The government has been implementing various schemes for the socio- economic development.

Legislative Measures For Safeguarding Women’s Interest: After independence the government of India has taken following legislative measures for safeguarding women’s interest.

- The Special Marriage Act, 1954- this Act fixed the age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females and provided right to women for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage.
- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955-prohibits child marriage, polygamy, polyandry & provides equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.
- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956- provides right to parental property.
- The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 –according to this Act childless woman can adopt a child and claim maintenance from her husband if she is divorced by him.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961-prevents giving and taking dowry and women exploitation.
- The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, 1956.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.
- The Family Court Act, 1984.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

Constitutional Provisions For Empowering Women In India

- equality before law for all persons (Article-14);
- prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(i)); However, special provisions may be made by the state in favour of women and children Article 15(3);
- equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16);
- state policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d);
- provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42);
- promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e)
- reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T).

In spite of the various measures taken up by the government after Independence and even during British rule the Women haven’t been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in India occupying highest offices of President, Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition or women occupying highest positions in the Corporate Sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women. The female foeticide is not an uncommon phenomenon. The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality. Women's empowerment benefits the society at large and is the magic key to a family's as well as a nation's well being. Women empowerment in

India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. 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.

Perspectives On Advancement Of Women Through Five Year Plans

First Five Year Plan It was mainly welfare oriented as far as women's issues were (1951-56) concerned. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector. The programmes for women were implemented through the National Extension Service Programmes through Community Development Blocks.

Second Five Year Plan Efforts were geared to organise "Mahila Mandals" (women's Plan(1956-61) groups) at grass-roots levels to ensure better implementation of welfare schemes.

Third, Fourth, Fifth They accorded high priority to women's education. Measures to and other Interim improve maternal and child health services, and supplementary Plans (1961-74) feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers were also introduced.

Sixth Five Year Plan This is regarded as a landmark in women's development. The Plan (1980-85) adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment of women.

Seventh Five Year Plan Development programmes for women were continued, with the Plan(1985-90) objective of raising their economic and social status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. A very significant step therein was to identify and promote "beneficiary-oriented programmes" which extended direct benefits to women.

Eighth Five Year Plan It attempted to ensure that the benefits of development from Plan (1992-97) different sectors did not bypass women. Special programmes were implemented to complement the general development programmes. The flow of benefits to women in the three core sectors of education, health and employment were monitored vigilantly. Women were enabled to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental process with reservation in the membership of local bodies. This approach of the Eighth Plan marks a definite shift from 'development' to empowerment' of women.

Ninth Five Year Plan(1997-2002) a) Empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes and Minorities as agents of socio-economic change and development.

b) Promoting and developing people's participatory institutions like Panchayati Raj institutions, cooperatives and self-help groups) Strengthening efforts to build self-reliance. d) The convergence of services from different sectors. e) A women's component plan at the Central and State levels.

Tenth Five Year Plan was formulated to ensure requisite access Plan (2002-2007) of women to information, resources and services, and advance gender equality goals.

Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) measures for gender empowerment and equity. The Ministry of Women and Child Development would make synergistic use of gender budget and gender mainstreaming process.

Source: India, Planning Commission. (2012). Five Year Plans. New Delhi.

UNDP REPORT :India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the gender inequality index – lower than Pakistan (123), according to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2013. The report said all countries in South Asia, with the exception of Afghanistan, were a better place for women than India, with Sri Lanka (75) topping them all. Nepal ranked 102nd and Bangladesh 111th. The annual U.N. report assesses how well countries world-wide are performing on human development indicators like health, education and income. The gender inequality index measures the loss in a country's progress and human development because of gender inequality in three sectors: reproductive health, women empowerment and labor market participation. The report notes that "gender inequality is especially tragic not only because it excludes women from basic social opportunities, but also because it gravely imperils the life prospects of future generations." India ranks low partly because of its skewed sex ratio, with only 940 females every 1000 males, according to Indian government data. Indian families often prefer boys to girls, and female feticide is tragically common. The UNDP study says that only 29% of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were a part of the country's labor force, compared to 80.7% men. In Parliament, only 10.9% of lawmakers are women, while in Pakistan 21.1% are women. In United States which ranks 42nd on the list, 57.5% women and 70.1% men are a part of the labor force. China fared even better, landing 35th. India also fares badly on education and health for women. Only 26.6% women above 25 years received a secondary education in 2010, compared to 50.4% of men. Pakistan scored even lower, with 18.3% of women having received secondary education compared to 43.1% of men. In the U.S., 94.7%

women have received a secondary education – a figure slightly higher than for men (94.3%). In China, this figure was 54.8% for women and 70.4% for men. In India, 200 women died every 100,000 childbirths, says the report. In China, the number was considerably lower (37 deaths) and in the U.S. even lower than that (21.) Overall, the report hails India's economic progress, but points at slow improvements on the human development front. On the human development index, India ranks 136 out of 187 countries mentioned in the study. India has made strides in reducing poverty by cash transfer and employment guaranteed programs for the poor, the report says. The report praises measures like the Right to Education Act, which reserves seats for the underprivileged in all schools in the country. But the report mentions that huge income inequalities, gender inequality and the caste divide remain major issues.

Measurement Of Women Empowerment :-The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified following three key areas of gender inequality in order to focus on gender empowerment measure (**GEM**) These key areas include: **(i)** Political participation and decision making power as measured by the percentage share of seats in parliament held by women vis-a-vis men. **(ii)** Economic participation and decision making power as measured by the percentage of positions such as legislators, senior officials, managers, technocrats and other professionals held by women vis-a-vis men; and **(iii)** Power over economic resources as measured by relative share in estimated earned income held by women and men.

Situation Today: The condition of women in India has undoubtedly improved since independence. Well-dressed women in Western attire driving scooters or cars to work are now an everyday sight in cities. Women doctors, lawyers, police officers and bureaucrats are common. However, the extent of this improvement is limited and mainly confined to the middle classes living in big cities. As a result, the gender gap in India runs deep, as revealed by the Global Gender Gap Report 2011, released by the World Economic Forum. India ranks pathetically at 113 among the 135 countries considered, indicating India is simply not doing enough for its women. Further, India's ranking has been falling steadily since 2006 when the Index was launched. In 2006, India was ranked 98th. That is a shameful reflection of the condition of the women in a country that is on a growth song. Available data indicate that the lack of education, poor health and living conditions still haunt women. It appears that India is simply not doing enough for its women to improve access to resources and freedom of movement especially for those who make around 75% of its total female population. The situation is really worst in India's heavily populated four large north Indian States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where, in parts, there is a deep-rooted mindset that women are inferior and must be restricted to being homemakers and child bearers. There is an urgent need to rethink as how to expedite the process of empowerment with innumerable obstacles.

Things Still To Ponder: One of the major aspects 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 from a long-long time. Atrocities and discrimination against women is a way of daily life in Indian society. 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 truth. Women have never been part of the mainstream society in India and they are still considered as a great liability. Educational attainment and economic participation are they key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. Educational attainment is essential for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content given to boys and men, updated with existing knowledge and relevant to current needs, women will be able to have access to well-paid formal sector jobs and advance with men. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society

Key Issues And Stages Of Women's Empowerment

1) Empowering Women: The first step therefore, is to initiate a change in the mindset not only of men, but also women themselves. While there are many things that can be done at the institutional or the governmental level like equality in education, medical treatment, job opportunities, etc; more can come in form of change in attitudes of the masses. For women's empowerment and equality it is therefore fundamental that women have the right to decide upon their choices without coercion or violence and have the freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

2) Importance of Gender Equality: Gender equality ensures same opportunities, rights and obligations for women in every sphere of life. This in turn implies equality in opinion, equal opportunities, financial independence and equal access to facilities like education and business as well as the opportunities to develop their personal ambitions.

3) Shifting of Roles: The roles that men and women play in a society are overlapping and changing rapidly. Unlike in the medieval times, these roles are not biologically determined these days, but are more interchangeable and are socially determined. Therefore, for a stronger social fabric it is important that a woman's potential contribution is harnessed to the optimum.

4) Identification of Needs and Concerns -To address any issue regarding women, firstly, the role that they play needs to be determined. This is governed by factors such as age, urban/rural orientation, social status and educational attainment. While women in general may have many common interests, the choices that they have may widely vary from region to region. Certain groups need more attention in order to address specific concerns.

5) Education for the Girl Child- Although education is important for all, it is more so for the girl child. Governments across the world have realized that investing in girls' education leads to overall reduction of poverty. Educated girls generally marry later and have smaller families. Similarly, educated women are more aware of health care and are better caretakers. Education also helps them to know about their rights and privileges. An educated mother generally has a greater influence in a household which help in securing more resources for herself and her children.

6) Giving Women More Autonomy- This can be done by focusing on letting women manage their own lives as far as issues like size of their family, education, employment, etc are concerned. Empowering women by giving them equal say in deciding such issues results in families benefitting, which in turn has ripple effects for the development of future generations. Women's empowerment deals with the entire gambit of day to day life which includes right to education, health and an equal status in work environment. It should also include the political empowerment that would guarantee women equality in basic human and legal rights, control of resources, land etc, and an equal opportunity in employment and earning.

Findings And Suggestions:-This is to specify significantly that the Constitution of India grants equality to women in various fields of life. Yet a large number of women are either ill equipped or not in a position to propel themselves out of their traditionally unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions. Female infanticide continues to be common. Statistics also show that there is still a very high preference for a male child in states like UP, MP, Punjab etc. The male to female ratio is very high in these states. Domestic violence is also widespread and is also associated with dowry. Women make up 52% of our country's population. Hence there can be no progress unless their needs and interests are fully met. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society. It is important to educate the women. The increase in gender disparity in wages in the urban areas is also quite marked as it results from the employment of women in different and lower paying activities. They are exploited at various levels. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society. The patterns of resource mobilization by government also have significant effects on women that are usually not recognized. This is not only because the consumption of such items may be curtailed but also because the provisioning of such items is frequently considered to be the responsibility of the women of the household. Women have not actively participated in their own emancipation due to their lack of economic independence and rampant illiteracy. There are quite a large number of issues which need to be addressed to streamline the existing women empowerment programmes in India as well as initiating actual work at the ground level. To initiate measurable actions at ground level, education of women should be given top priority and female literacy programmes need to be enforced across the country. Further to improve the socioeconomic conditions women need to be trained and better equipped for taking informed decisions. The real change will be only visible when social attitudes and norms change. Here inclusive programmes involving the men are the need of the hour. This will be helpful for working out adjustments and sharing of gender based specific performance or tasks which are currently overburdening the women to no end. Unless we improve the ground level living standards of women in India we might not be able to influence their empowerment in any other possible way. Various issues that need to be addressed for improving overall conditions of the women in India include making access to affordable cooking fuel for rural women, providing safe drinking water, sanitation, increasing decision making capacity among women, providing equal wages as that of men, ending their exploitation, improving the political participation of women, eradicating poverty among women, increasing the security of women who are engaged in agriculture as daily wage workers, providing affordable healthcare and nutrition and managing the risk of unwanted pregnancies, HIV infections and sexually transmitted diseases. It has to be understood that unless we change the basic social attitude which cultivates gender inequality and gender bias we would not be able to achieve much in terms of women empowerment in India. There are many laws and there have been many amendments that have been carried out to end the discrimination against women and empower women in all aspects of life. Gender equality is enshrined in Indian constitution and constitution empowers the state to end the gender based discrimination against women. There is reservation of seats in local bodies and municipalities and another law is

being envisioned for reservation in parliament. But the sad part is that all these laws and amendments have become toothless as the fundamental problems lies in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against women. Now what is the solution? The only solution is for women to come together as a unifying force and initiate self empowering actions at the ground level. Let it happen even if it is at a slow pace initially but it must happen despite however small the initial steps might look like. So the connection is very clear. Once we work towards self empowerment through small number of infinite actions, we become aware of the ground realities and then we can think about taking further recourse towards changing the mindset of the society which fosters gender inequality and bias. women's empowerment cannot take place unless women come together and decide to self-empower themselves. The struggle for gender justice will be slow, strenuous and protracted, as the change cannot be brought about easily. It has to be fought at emotional, cognitive and action levels.

Measures To Be Taken: According to Mahatma Gandhi, “If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family.” Our predominant patriarchal system doesn’t provide enough chances for women to have higher education even if they wish. Girls should be motivated to take up higher education. Universal education for all below 14 years should be strictly implemented. Gender sensitive curricula should be framed at all stages of primary education to address sex-stereotyping menace. It is also necessary to sensitize the other sex towards women. It is important to usher changes in the societal attitudes and perceptions with regard to the role of women in different spheres of life. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. Legislations such as Equal Remuneration Act, Factories Act, etc, Constitutional safeguards such as maternity relief, and other provisions should be strictly followed. Macroeconomic policies would help in this drive. Through economic empowerment women’s emancipation could be realized. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society.

Political empowerment of women is necessary for their emancipation. In recent years many steps have been taken so as to increase the participation of women in the political system. The Women's reservation policy bill is however a very sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in parliament. Further, there is the Panchayati Raj System, where women have been given 50% representation as a sign of political empowerment. Apart from these, strict implementation of programs and acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society. Strict measures should be taken for the implementation of Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act 1994, which prohibits any prenatal diagnostic techniques and sex selective abortions. Dowry prohibition acts and other legislations pertaining to woman emancipation must be implemented strictly.

II. Conclusion:

To conclude, it might be observed that India has enacted many constitutional and legislative provisions for empowerment of women. Many development schemes especially for women have also been launched for improving their fortune. Such measures have started giving positive outcomes relating to women's problems. But the position of women in our country still leaves much to be desired. Top priority should be given in our developmental plans for improving female literacy and creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet. Unless the process of development is properly engendered, it shall remain endangered. One concurrent example of gender discrimination is glass-ceiling effect. The term “glass ceiling” is used to describe an invisible barrier where women are deprived of opportunities at all levels of employment and are discriminated only because they are women. No doubt women have the potential to achieve an equal footing with men. But, it is the social practices and male attitudes that are making an effective and invisible barrier preventing women from rising above a certain point. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grass root problem. Swami Vivekananda had said **“That nation which doesn’t respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future”** and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work towards giving women their much deserved status.

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