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*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side
Rig Veda*

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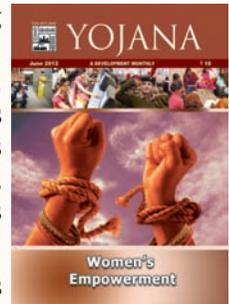
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About the Issue

Empowerment of women is a major social phenomenon which requires an understanding of its multi-dimensional influence, including our family structures and units. The 2011 Census contains an important message because it is far from a balanced gender ratio. More worrisome is the child sex ratio in the 0-6 age group as it reflects the continuing bias against girls. The challenge is to work towards a balanced population and if these prejudices are to be overcome, the rights of women need to be protected. Greater access to education, health, skill building, credit facilities and opportunities for decision making and legal rights should be made available to women to empower them.



The principle of gender equality is enshrined in our Constitution which guarantees equality to women, and empowers the State to adopt measures of positive determination in favour of women for removing the cumulative socio-economic, educational disadvantages faced by them. Within a framework of democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres.

The government has several programmes which cover welfare and support services, awareness generation and gender sensitization. These programmes play a supplementary role to other developmental programmes in health, education, agriculture and rural development sectors. All these efforts are directed to make women economically and socially empowered so that they can become equal and active partners in national development along with men.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 has outlined three policy approaches to do away with gender inequality. It has been proposed to make the legal system more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs. Moreover, women must be economically and socially empowered through focussed efforts. Statistics showed the overall picture of gender inequality in India is stark and the way out is not to camouflage reality by resolving to tokenism and parading exceptions, but tackling problems head on. But mere Government intervention is not enough. Better results can be produced by determined women citizens empowering themselves and being encouraged to do so by enlightened segments of society and public opinion.

Government of India's policy on women development has undergone various shift of emphasis since independence. The most significant changes occurred during the Fifth Five Year Plan with the shift from welfare to development. During the Eighth Plan, there was a renewed emphasis on development of women as equal partners in the development process. Today, with focus on inclusive growth, there is a heightened awareness about inclusiveness and empowerment. Women need to empower themselves from below, and this calls for a change of values and behavior and the need for economic empowerment. All problems centre around inequality and therefore, steps to promote equality of treatment and full integration of women in the development of the country must be promoted.

This edition of Yojana dwells on some of these contentious issues, initiatives, success stories, and the problems and prospects that confront the policy makers in bringing about holistic empowerment of women in India. It would be apt to quote Swami Vivekananda "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing." Surely it is time to change this. □

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Rethinking Policy on Child Sex Ratios

Mary E John



Rather than only worry about balancing numbers, what is required are state policies that actually seek to create the conditions for meaningful life-chances, beginning with those of girls and women

HOW SHOULD we approach the whole question of sex ratios and the counting of girls? This is a very important question to ask at a time when the child sex ratio has dropped from 927 in 2001 to an all time low of 914. Even the Secretary in the Home Ministry said in the wake of the Census 2011 results that the government must re-examine its policies. But first, what has been the story so far and what can we learn from Census 2011?

Child Sex Ratios in India since 1991

In order to begin a discussion of India's child sex ratio patterns, a Table has been prepared drawing from both earlier Census figures and the provisional figures available. The difference in successive decades has also been included for easy reference. The break-up of the country into the regions of the North-west, North-central, West, East and South offers a quick

overview of broad patterns in the last two decades. (One might keep at the back of our minds not just that this period happens to correspond to the so-called era of neo-liberalism, but also that it spans roughly a generation.) At the national level, the decline of 18 points in 2001 has now been followed by a further decline of 13 points. As more families are having fewer children (registered by the reduced fertility rates) there is therefore an ongoing gendering in their sex composition. To put it briefly, practices leading to fewer girls in the 0-6 age group have been spreading more thinly over the last decade over a much larger proportion of the country. The circle is widening.

The figures from 1991 have been included in order to recall why the Census 2001 made such headlines a decade ago. This was when the child sex ratio (CSR) first dropped below that of the overall sex ratio: While the child sex ratio fell from 943 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, that of the overall sex ratio rose from 927 to

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Table: Child Sex Ratios (0-6 years) Census 1991, 2001, 2011, Select States

State	(Females per 1,000 males)				
	1991	2001	difference 2001-1991	2011	difference 2011-2001
INDIA	945	927	- 18	914	-13
North-West					
Himachal P	951	896	-53	906	+10
Punjab	875	798	-77	846	+48
Haryana	879	819	-40	830	+11
Chandigarh	899	845	-46	867	+ 22
Delhi	915	868	-47	866	2
North-Central					
Uttar Pradesh	928	916	-12	899	-17
Madhya P	952	932	-20	912	-20
West					
Gujarat	928	883	-45	886	+3
Rajasthan	916	909	-7	883	-16
Maharashtra	946	913	-33	883	-30
Goa	964	938	-26	920	-18
East					
Bihar	959	942	-17	933	-9
Jharkhand	NA	965		943	-22
West Bengal	967				
Nagaland	993	964	-29	944	-20
Orissa	967	953	-14	934	-19
South					
Andhra P	975	961	-14	943	-18
Karnataka	960	946	-14	943	-3
Tamil Nadu	948	942	-6	946	+4
Kerala	958	960	+2	959	-1

933 in the same period (a clear sign that life expectancy among women was increasing significantly). It was in 2001 that several states in north west India witnessed plunges in their child sex ratios – with Punjab leading the way by dropping below the 800 mark, while other states such as Himachal Pradesh experienced huge declines for the first time. Secondly, 2001 made history (especially at the district level) because of evidence of child

sex ratios falling below the 950 mark (taken as the general norm the world over) in other parts of the country outside the north-west, such as Goa, urban Orissa, and even pockets in the North-East. In the North-west these patterns were put down to the intensification of practices of sex selection at birth in regions with known prior histories of female infanticide and higher female mortality; elsewhere, a smaller proportion of families were

now resorting to similar practices probably for the first time.

Moving on to Census 2011, the state figures point to a clear difference between the north-west and the rest of India. It would appear that there has been a peaking (or plateauing) of the practice of sex selection in states like Gujarat, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, with small improvements from very low levels in Chandigarh and Punjab. (Notice that none of the north western states have fallen further, though they have by no means come back to 1991 levels, which were themselves well below the 950 mark.) Punjab's rise from 798 to 846 (48 points) according to 2011 figures makes it now look more like its neighbours, but only a district wise analysis would reveal where the real changes are. In states like Delhi and Gujarat roughly the same proportion of families are resorting to sex selection as was true a decade ago (since this is a comparison of the number of girl children born and alive between 1996-2001 and 2006-2011). In Punjab the severity of the practice has thus only eased slightly. According to a news report mentioning district level data for the state of Haryana, the district of Kurukshetra (which had the worst CSR of 771 in 2001) now has a CSR of 817, similar to the trend for Punjab. However, many more districts (Jhajjar, Mahendragarh, Rewari, Bhiwani, Faridabad, among others) have worse CSRs than in 2001.

Whatever the 'improvements' (if that is the right word) in north-west India, CSRs are falling in large parts of western, central and eastern India – Maharashtra, Goa,

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and even Andhra Pradesh has joined the ranks from among the southern states. (Of course, the state of Tamil Nadu is well known for its history of female infanticide and sex selection in districts like Salem and Dharmapuri – so it remains to be seen what a more disaggregated picture of that state would reveal.) *In other words, the state wise figures demonstrate a widening of the circle – even if the numbers are not dramatic – well beyond the so-called prosperity belt of north-west India, to the poorer states.* A recent news report on UP, for instance, highlights the spread of sex selection to eastern towns and districts where it was hardly known before. (The only state whose figures are so strange that there is every reason to doubt them is Jammu and Kashmir, where the Census was undertaken after a gap in 1991, in 2001 and 2011. According to the provisional figures the CSR has plummeted from 941 to 859, namely 82 points; along with this, J&K is the only state in the whole country to have registered a positive increase in its fertility during this period. Whatever the form that the ongoing conflict is taking, such figures are hard to make sense of, and require further investigation.)

It is likely that the ‘improvements’ in the north-west are related to efforts at monitoring the use of sex determination testing, in contrast with its spread elsewhere. But it would be wrong to equate the two, since the picture is more complex than that. The very fact that the CSRs are falling in such a wide variety of states – from Goa in the west, which is not associated with high levels of poverty, to poor states

like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and then again with a heterogenous state like Maharashtra witnessing one of the steepest declines in 2011 of 30 points, make it absolutely necessary to wait for the time when a more contextual micro level understanding can be undertaken.

To give an example of such contextual analysis during the previous decade, in a study conducted by a group of researchers (John et al 2008) during 2003-05 in five of the lowest CSR districts of north west India, it became evident that within this broad belt where child sex ratios had dropped severely, local contexts were nonetheless extremely significant. Thus for instance, while Fatehgar Sahib in Punjab demonstrated the presence of families with just one son (especially among Jat Sikhs and urban upper castes), and families in Kangra and Rohtak strived for two children (but very few with only girls), in the districts of Dholpur and Morena significant forms of child neglect leading to high rates of mortality among girls in larger families went hand in hand with the growing practice of sex selection.

The Debate so Far

In order to get a better perspective on adverse sex ratios, let us recall the decade of the 1980s when practices of amniocentesis for sex selection became the subject of the first campaigns by women’s groups and health activists in Maharashtra, Delhi and Punjab. At that time, this issue garnered little public support, indeed, it was not even clear to most people what the problem was. Today we might be in the opposite situation, where the sex ratio has become the symbol for gender discrimination

as such, and few are interested in anything beyond it. One must underscore, therefore, the extent of activism and analysis both in India and abroad, and the range of organisations, from local groups, the state, religious organisations, international bodies, and so on, who are closely monitoring these figures. In a more self-critical vein, the child sex ratio has become a veritable academic and advocacy industry in its own right.

The results of the Census 2011 have therefore been highly awaited, if from varying perspectives. Some scholars have offered predictions of likely patterns, drawing from the National Family Health Surveys (the most recent being NFHS III, 2005-06), as well as the Sample Registration at Births (SRBs) made available every year. Significant differences have also been crystallising.. Has there been too great or too little a focus on the PCPNDT Act? Counter intuitively, could there be reduced son preference even though the numbers are skewed? Is the problem one of “mindsets” out of synch with modern values of equality, or, does modernity itself have a lot to do with what is happening? On the one hand, some advocates believed that the main focus ought to be the criminalisation of unscrupulous medical practitioners, while others warned of how the very advocacy against sex selection was turning into a problematic campaign against abortions per se. While some predicted heightened practices of “female genocide”, others saw signs of a turn-around.

There is something curious about much of this debate and the positions that have been taken. On what basis would we, after all,

expect change to happen? Planning the size and sex composition of one's children is surely at the confluence of a range of processes, from stretching limited resources, wanting the 'best' for one's children with the effect of heightening the burden of having them, extreme socio-economic volatility, varying individual morality, the kinds of technologies available, and the nature of gender disparities across classes in contemporary society. Much has been said about signs of reduced son preference as more and more families say that they want a girl and a boy. But what if this preference actually translates into the statement "at least one boy, and at most one girl"? Moreover, what kind of structural changes are we witnessing such that expectations of a turn around could have a genuine basis?

As already mentioned, the Secretary to the Home Ministry went on record to say that, in the face of this further decline in the child sex ratio, the state should re-examine its policies. There has been far too much focus on the need to restore the 'balance' to the skewed numbers. What is forgotten is that, in a growing population like ours with its hypergamous marriage market, male privilege has benefited over generations from an excess of marriageable women in any given cohort. In other words, there has been an invisible structural imbalance at work in most parts of the country outside the north west, but which was never considered to be a problem to be 'corrected'. Indeed, the peculiar case of Kerala with its positive sex ratio but highly discriminatory practices against women is a case in point. Secondly, in all the focus on sex ratios, fertility

and literacy, little attention is given to what is arguable the most critical indicator of the status of gender in our country. The most recent round of the National Sample Survey (64th Round, 2007-8) has the stunning revelation that, after twenty years of unprecedented economic growth, the total proportion of women in any kind of paid work is no more than 15 percent. Another way of putting this would be to say that 85

percent of all women are destined to find their future through structural forms of dependency. This does not even begin to discuss the nature of the work that constitutes the 15 percent. Therefore, rather than only worry about balancing numbers, what is required are state policies that actually seek to create the conditions for meaningful life-chances, beginning with those of girls and women. □

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NCW: Twenty Years of Empowering Women

Mamta Sharma



***Empowerment
of women will
also bring down
atrocities against
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and knowledge to
stand up for their
rights***

NATIONAL COMMISSION for Women (NCW) has completed 20 years of successfully empowering women.

The NCW tirelessly works round the year for empowerment of women. An apex national organization, NCW was constituted on January, 31, 1992 as a statutory body in pursuance of the NCW Act, 1990 to safeguard the interests of women in India.

NCW has a wide mandate covering almost all aspects of women's development and plays a pivotal role in studying and monitoring all matters relating to the constitution and legal safeguards provided to women. It reviews the existing legislations and suggests amendments wherever necessary to meet any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcoming in such laws and also suggests fresh legislations. It looks into the complaints and takes suo-moto notice of cases involving deprivation of women's rights, etc, of women in order to provide them support, legal care and assistance. It also monitors the proper implementation of all

the legislations made to protect the rights of women, so as to enable them to achieve equality in all spheres of life. The primary mandate of the Commission is to review the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate Redressal of grievances and advise the government on all policy matters affecting women.

Structure and Functions of NCW

As per NCW Act, there is to be one Chairperson, one Member Secretary and Five non-official members in the Commission. The functions of the Commission are mainly divided in to four cells namely Complaints & Investigation Cell, Legal Cell, NRI Cell and Research and Studies Cell. Almost all the activities of the Commission are undertaken through these cells.

The Complaints and Investigation Cell is the core unit of the Commission. It processes oral/written complaints / newspaper reports and takes suo-moto cognizance of cases under Section

The author is Chairperson, National Commission for Women.

10 (1) 7 94) of the NCW Act, 1990. For serious crimes, the Commission constitutes Inquiry Committees which make on the spot inquiries, examine various witnesses, collect evidence and submit reports with recommendations. Such investigations help in providing immediate relief and justice to the victims of violence and atrocities. The Commission monitors the implementation of the recommendations of the Inquiry Committees by taking up the matter with the concerned State Governments/Authorities.

In keeping with its mandate, the Commission initiates various steps to improve the status of women and works for their socio-economic empowerment. The Commission's Chairperson, Members and officers visit various part of the country to attend meetings/seminars/workshop/public hearings, organized by NCW/ Non Government organizations (NGOs) ;Women Study Centres of Universities and investigates various cases of atrocities committed against women. Besides, they visit jails, hospitals to know the plight of women prisoners and women patients respectively and recommend to the concerned authorities for their redressal. They attend legal awareness camps on legal rights of women etc; organised by NGOs/Women study centres of the Universities to gain first hand knowledge about the problems faced by women there so as to suggest re medial measures and to take up the issues with the concerned authorities.

Redressal of Complaints

The Commission receives a large number of complaints and also takes suo-moto cognizance in several cases to provide speedy justice by constituting Inquiry Committees. The commission sponsors legal awareness programmes, Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats and organizes seminar/workshop/consultation and

takes up publicity against female foeticide, violence against women, child marriages etc. in order to generate awareness among women about these issues.

In complaints related to sexual harassment at work place, the concerned organization/ department is urged to constitute an internal Complaints Committees as per the Hon'ble Supreme Court Judgement in Vishaka Vs. State of Rajasthan (AIR 1997 Supreme Court 3011). The complaints received relate to various categories of crimes against women such as domestic violence dowry demand and harassment, torture, murder, kidnapping/ abduction, complaints against NRIs/ NRI marriages, desertion, bigamy, rape, police apathy, harassment/ brutality, cruelty by husband, deprivation of women rights, gender discrimination, sexual harassment/ harassment.

The Commission was made National Level Nodal Co-ordinating Agency in 2009 to receive and process all complaints from India and abroad related to Indian Women deserted by their overseas Indian husbands resulting from cross – country marriages and a NRI Cell was inaugurated on September 24, 2009. The complaints relate to deprivation of women's rights or any issue involving grave injustice to women. Since its inception, 933 cases have been registered in NRI Cell till March, 31, 2012. A need was felt to review the MOIA Scheme for providing legal and financial help to the deserted women in foreign lands. The amendments proposed by the Commission regarding the scope of the scheme to be widened were taken seriously by MOIA and the scheme has been modified accordingly.

Recent Initiatives

The Commission has taken a number of initiatives to create awareness among women and their capacity building to exercise their right for dignified life and

sensitizing the police personnel. Some of these initiatives include 'Violence free home-a women's right', 'Jago' as well as MOUs signed with other organizations for partnership.

Mahila Adhikar Abhiyan, has been launched in Rajasthan successfully in 2011, Street Plays initially in few states namely Rajasthan, Punjab and Participation in Vatsalya Mela etc.

The Commission has also brought out a number of publications. Some of them are 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore', Meera Didi Se Poocho', Sexual Harassment at work place', Problems relating to NRI Marriages – Dos and Don't's, The Nowhere Brides, Handbook on Laws relating to Dowry and Domestic Violence, Do not Fear – Do not Bear – Do not Admit, Abandoned Indian Women Trapped in NRI Marriage and the Way Out', Bahut Hua Ab Aur Nahi Sahna' etc.

NCW concentrates not only on women's empowerment but also on their growth and development including health care and education. In order to bring down atrocities committed against women, there should be interaction between NCW, the police and the Media. Rashtra Mahila, a monthly news letter of the Commission, highlights the activities of the Commission as well as successful stories with regard to complaints lodged before the Commission and also important court and Government decisions affecting women.

A number of foreign delegations have visited NCW to have an insight about the working of NCW and its role in safeguarding the interests of women and also understand the status of Indian women in politics and their empowerment.

Consultations, Public Contact Programmes and Research Activities

The Commission undertakes promotional and educational

research so as to suggest ways of ensuring due representation of women in all spheres and identify factors responsible for impeding their advancement. During the period of August, 2, 2011 to February 2, 2012, 124 National /Regional Seminars /Conferences /Workshops were conducted by NCW. Besides, 941 Legal Awareness Camps were organized under the programme Chalo Gaon Ki Ore, and 290 Public Hearings / Awareness Programmes, 80 Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalasts, and 96 Research Studies were sponsored.

Some of the subjects on which seminars, conferences, consultations etc. have been organized by the Commission are Surrogacy and Assisted Reproductive Technologies, Indecent Representation of Women in media, Compensation to rape victims, women Working in Night Shifts, Laws Relating to Marriages, Atrocities on women labeled as Witches, Domestic Violence against Women Empowerment of Women, Maintenance, Women's Rights in North Eastern Region, Child Marriage NRI Marriages, Crime Against Women Implementation of PC – PNDT Act, Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Women Changes, Challenges and Convergence Plan, Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking in India, Political Participation of Women in Decision Making, etc. Public Hearings were organised on Domestic Violence, Pre-natal Sex Selection, Declining Sex Ratio, Maternal Health Services, Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in North East Region, Women Rights, Muslim Women, Role of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Child Marriage, etc.

Chairperson and Members have visited Kota Jail, Thiruvananthapuram Jail, Puducherry Jail, Bangalore Central Jail, Nari Bandi Niketan Lucknow, Banda district Jail, Goa Jail, Correctional Home at Alipur and Yewada Women

prison in Maharashtra and made recommendations to the concerned authorities.

National Helpline to be run by National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women in April this year, launched a 24X7 toll free helpline for Women in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. This helpline is being run by an NGO Ahmedabad Women Action Group (AWAG). The helpline has been launched on a pilot basis.

New 20 Years – Landmark Achievements

The Commission during the last twenty years has reviewed/proposed various laws.

Amendments have been suggested in the laws such as :

- Implementation of the protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005
- Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- Prohibition of Sexual Harassment of Women as Workplace Bill 2010
- Sexual Assault Bill.
- Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010
- Amendments proposed on 125 Cr. PC regarding Maintenance
- Marriageable Age
- Amendments proposed to PWDV Act, Tenancy Right
- Review of MTP Act Central Legislation on Dayan Pratha (Witchcraft)
- “Save Home, Save Family” Project was introduced in 2008 under MOU with Delhi Police to provide counseling and to deal with women effectively. The project has been extended till 31st March 2012 to all the Districts of Delhi
- The commission was made as National Level Nodal Coordinating Agency in 2009

to receive and process all complaints related to Indian Women deserted by their overseas Indian husbands and a NRI Cell was inaugurated on 24th September 2009

- MOU has been signed with UNIFEM in January 2010 for prevention of human trafficking

New Draft Bill Recommended

- Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour & Traditional Bill, 2010
- Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation to Victims of Acid Attack.
- Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation to Victims of Rape
- National Commission for Women has proposed a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for providing matching assistance to State Governments to encourage them to appoint independent Protection Officers with supporting staff for effective implementation of PWDVA.

In course of the last 20 years, NCW has been striving towards enabling women to achieve equality and equal participation in all spheres of life by securing her due rights and entitlements through suitable policy formulations, legislative measures, effective enforcement of laws, etc.

To conclude, I believe that empowerment of women will also bring down atrocities against women as they will have the strength and knowledge to stand up for their rights. The National Commission for Women is committed as per its mandate, to help achieve the goals of development and empowerment of women legally, socially, politically and economically and thereby improving the status of women in the society. Though some improvement is reflected, yet a lot remains to be done. □

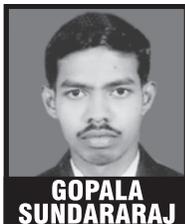


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Stree Shakti

Rashmi Singh



Women's concerns have to be kept at the centre of public policy, developmental planning and governance, with recognition of their role as critical growth agents and as ambassadors of social change

IN A recent visit to Rajasthan, during the course of my interaction with local community women at a 'Panchayat Ghar', problems related to exclusion from the BPL list, lack of adequate teachers in the neighbouring school, and problems in accessing government schemes such as the *Indira Awas Yojana* were voiced. The *panchayat* secretary accompanying me for the visit advised the women that discussion was supposed to be on woman empowerment issues and not these matters which were different departmental concerns and not that of the national mission for woman empowerment. This official probably reflected the largely perceived notions of women empowerment which viewed empowerment from narrow definitions, often as only rhetoric. Increasingly however the linkage of woman empowerment to good governance and larger development of the nation is getting acknowledged with a need

for multi stakeholder response and a multi disciplinary approach.

This paper attempts to bring out nuances of *streeshakti* and woman empowerment by highlighting some pioneering government programmes, namely the *Stree Shakti*, and *Mission Convergence* in Delhi, and the *National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)*, Government of India. The uniqueness of these programmes is in their multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach with 'mantra' of 'convergence' fully embedded in design and philosophy.

Stree Shakti literally meaning woman power is a visible name today adopted by some NGOs as their brand names, as also some government programmes and initiatives. A national award instituted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India is also called *Stree Shakti*. However the name has become largely synonymous with a larger public private community partnership programme in Delhi

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which started in the form of *Stree Shakti* camps and later evolved into a network of *Stree Shakti Kendras* all over the city. The project focussed on reaching out to poor women and providing them, social, economic and legal empowerment, through access to healthcare facilities, non-formal education, vocational training and awareness on legal issues. It became one of focus areas of Bhagidari: a Citizen– Government partnership initiative of the government, with NGOs becoming key instruments for community outreach. An Evaluation of the project undertaken by the Institute for Human Development, Delhi (2006) brought out interesting observations. These camps successfully bridged the gap between community and public health system and in three years nearly 2 lakhs women had been benefitted. Camp volunteers were the main agents of spreading awareness as they conducted pre-registration survey, and collected health related information. Beneficiaries reported satisfaction on account of easy contact with doctors, satisfaction with doctors' behaviour and free availability of medicines. Convergence aspect stood out strongly since the initiative brought various departments together on a common platform- health department, ICDS for Nutrition awareness, and other like State AIDS Control Society, TB society, Legal Service Authority, Training & Technical Education, Education etc. Use of school buildings as venue led to spin off benefit of schools turning into community hubs. The Evaluation Report reflected that the project clearly brought changes for better in the lives of deprived women through decentralized delivery process, and increased level of awareness amongst women regarding quality

of life. Skill development trainings widened the income generation opportunities. Legal awareness increased and women came out in the open to fight against dowry related, family-related and other injustice. Increase in number of SHGs opened opportunities for accessibility to market and finance. It was pointed out that the major strength of this set up was the conceptual acceptance that women find it difficult to come out of household chore even if opportunities are there and hence bringing services to their doorstep was important. It was also observed that the intervention constantly needed growth and modification with changing 'needs' and 'situation' – in covering the untouched and newer dimensions of women's empowerment.

Some of the other major recommendations were to have district nodal NGOs, creating annual baseline to determine area-wise target group, spacing camps to be organised quarterly rather than monthly, strengthening linkages, setting concrete indicators and measurable goals, and institutionalizing a system of third party evaluations.

These suggestions were taken forward in the year 2008 when Mission Convergence, Delhi was started with an attempt to bring convergence amongst hosts of government schemes and programmes meant for poor. The groundwork of *Stree Shakti* served extremely useful in giving the new initiative a bottom up approach. The scope of Mission Convergence was much larger compared to *Stree Shakti* but some of the key elements remained the same. The Mission adopted a horizontal vision cutting across sectors and departments against

the conventional approach of government's functioning in departmental mode or moving through vertical channels across departments. '*Bhagidari*' was taken to another level, with priority for action at the bottom of the pyramid in active collaboration with Non-Governmental organizations with strong field presence. The focus was on women and reaching out to families through women. Slums, JJ colonies, resettlement colonies, and other 'vulnerable' locations became the target areas for intervention. The programme was recognized for its pioneering work in inclusive governance and community engagement by the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) and also became the recipient of the United Nations Public Service Award.

For effective implementation in mission mode, a Special Purpose Vehicle called *Samajik Suvidha Sangam* was set up in May, 2008 involving government functionaries from 9 departments and social sector experts. More than 120 local NGOs became partners and served as extended arms of government for mobilizing people at grass roots to avail pensions, and other social security schemes, besides public services in health, education, legal aid, and skill training.

Some innovative strategies used to make convergence possible were the use of common eligibility criteria and common application forms by different departments, common database of 'vulnerable' through massive household and street survey which could be used by different departments for better targeting of their schemes and create a more realistic and accurate estimate of poverty; creation of 'single-window' facilitation centres

close to communities to assist with linkages with government departments; decentralization and devolution of power to the districts; computerization and networking of all extension outposts; innovative ways of capacity development of NGOs, government functionaries, and the target group; financial inclusion for women through SHGs and individual bank accounts etc. A path breaking measure was adoption of new criteria to identify the city' spoor. Proxy indicators of income using spatial, social, and occupational dimensions of vulnerability were developed under the guidance of experts of national repute. A separate survey was undertaken to identify the homeless who were categorized as "most vulnerable", and special programmes were initiated to support this category especially the destitute women. The strong gender focus in Mission Convergence became the strength of the programme. One of the core pillars of the programme became its emphasis on development of human capital of women through strengthening measures for improved health, literacy levels, and skill building. The *Stree Shakti- Suvidha Kendras* created under the Mission mobilized women in their catchment area and enrolled them under different schemes and services, including mobilizing them to join Self-help Groups. The creation of database of 13 lakh potentially vulnerable households provided a strong empirical base for budgetary planning and higher allocations across different schemes of the government. Delhi became the second state after Maharashtra to kick-start the UID programme, and as the registrar, I had the satisfaction of getting the first 'Aadhar' number in city for a homeless, destitute woman on October 2nd, 2011 along with a bank

account in her name. The woman's response was-"now my daily earnings will not be stolen from the pavement I slept". The survey identified various vulnerable categories- such as physically and mentally challenged women, those affected with debilitating diseases, in hazardous occupation, women headed households, destitute women etc.

The collaboration which Mission Convergence forged with civil society organizations was significant in terms of scale and impact. Sharing of power and authority with civil society organizations (CSOs) demonstrated a new model of GO-NGO collaboration. The programme itself empowered the CSOs to question government's performance and decisions, and inform policy.

On the national canvass too there has been a wide recognition of the need to break silos and create convergence mechanisms across schemes and programmes. The initiative came from the first woman president of the country, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil to set up a Committee of Governors in 2008 to study and recommend strategies for speedy socioeconomic development and empowerment of woman. The Committee gave its recommendations in Feb.2009 which was considered by a Group of Ministers and thereafter the Finance Minister in his Budget Speech announced:-

- (i) Setting up a High Powered Committee of eminent persons and experts to study the Status of Women of India to enable the Government to take expeditious action;
- (ii) Setting up a 'National Mission for Empowerment of Women' for implementation of women-

centric programmes in a Mission mode to achieve better coordination and synergy amongst the participating stakeholders;

- (iii) Restructuring of the *Rashtriya MahilaKosh (RMK)*, a government run micro finance agency, to scale up its activities and to function as a single window facilitators and service provider for women Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

As a sequel to this, Ministry of WCD has set up a high level committee under Justice Ruma Pal. The corpus of RMK was substantially enhanced and structural modifications introduced for enabling the agency to serve as a more vibrant institution. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Hon'ble President on 8th March, 2010. During the launch of the Mission on International Women's Day, 2010, the spirit of this new initiative for women was very comprehensively encapsulated by the Hon'ble President herself as seen from the following excerpt from her speech on the occasion at Vigyan Bhawan:

"The socio-economic development of women is deeply intertwined and if one dimension remains absent, the outcome would suffer. The Mission, with its objective of ensuring that the benefits of schemes and programmes of the Central, as well as State Governments, reach their intended beneficiaries through convergence and coordination, gives me hope that it will bridge this gap between "what is" and "what ought to be". But in order to make this a reality, the central Government, States, and civil society would need to work together. Every citizen of this country has a role to play in making it successful. I would

regard this Mission as a gift to the women of the country on the occasion of International Women's day."

One of the primary objectives of the Mission is to oversee gender mainstreaming of programmes, policies, institutional arrangements and processes of participating Ministries, institutions and organizations, and undertake awareness generation to fuel the demand for benefits under various schemes and programmes. The Mission Authority is headed by the Prime Minister, and has 13 partner ministries with WCD ministry as the nodal ministry. This Mission is an attempt to put women's concerns at the very core of public policy and governance with the goal of social and economic empowerment of women with particular emphasis on health, education and livelihood, progressively eliminating violence against women, and reducing information gap between users and providers of services and entitlements.

While reaching out to state governments through state mission authorities, Mission is catalyzing state actions for review of schemes, programmes and legislations with a gender lens, and conduct of gender audit and outcome assessment. Technical support is being provided to the states through the National Resource Centre set up as an inter-sectoral, multi-disciplinary body at the centre to draw up state action plans for improving gender development indices, and setting up requisite institutional mechanisms such as State Resource Centre for Women with funding support from the central government. A series of regional conferences were held in Feb-April, 2012 covering all states and UTs for sharing best practices

on inter-sector convergence of scheme & meant for women and to build capacities of practitioners on effective strategies for convergence, while customizing the same to regional perspectives and challenges. Some of the common grounds which emerged were the need to have an integrated approach to simultaneously address social, economic, and political empowerment, adopting a life cycle approach, creating gender focal points at all levels, instituting systems for collecting and using gender disaggregated data, focus on gender sensitization and public education on gender issues, increasing awareness on government schemes and programmes, strengthening capacities, fostering women's collectives as instruments of social change, rationalizing existing schemes, institutionalizing and strengthening participatory governance framework, and creating a robust system of ongoing monitoring and review.

Amongst some of the tools for gender mainstreaming which this Mission is focussing is Gender Budgeting (GB). The purpose of GB is to ensure the translation of Government's policy commitments on gender equity into budgetary allocations. To institutionalize the process of Gender Budgeting, Gender Budget Cells (GBCs) were set up in all Central Ministries/Departments in 2005. These GBCs are envisaged to serve as focal points for coordinating gender budgeting initiatives within their Ministries and across Departments. Currently, 56 Ministries/Departments of Government of India have set up Gender Budgeting Cells. A significant breakthrough is mainstreaming GB in India has been the introduction of GB Statement (20) in the Union Budget 2005-06. The GB Statement has emerged as an important tool for

bringing together all information on the allocations for women. It serves as a reporting mechanism and provides an indication of the funds flowing to women. Over the years, the number of Ministries/Departments reporting in the GB Statement has gone up from 9 (2005-06) to 29 (2011-12). Also the magnitude of GB allocations as a percentage of total budget has gone up from 2.79 percent in 2005-06 to 6.22 percent in 2011-12. Ministry of WCD is the nodal agency for GB.

Conclusion

The approach of addressing issues related to empowerment of women from a holistic and macro-point of view acknowledging the cross cutting linkages between economic, social and political identity of woman presents a new hope. There is increasing recognition that these factors are deeply intertwined and if efforts in any one dimension remains absent or weak, the outcome and momentum generated by the other components cannot be sustained, and that it is only when all these three factors are addressed simultaneously and made compatible with each other can women be truly empowered. Therefore, for the holistic empowerment of women, all ministries and departments would need to energize synergistic measures through more effective use of tools such as Gender Budgeting and platforms such as the National Mission for Empowerment of Women. The gender convergence mantra also holds a key to inclusive governance and our cherished dream of growth with justice and equity. Women's concerns have to be kept at the centre of public policy, developmental planning and governance, with recognition of their role as critical growth agents and as ambassadors of social change. □

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NORTH EAST DIARY

HYBRID RICE CULTIVATION IN ASSAM

Assam Government has set an ambitious target of expanding area under hybrid rice cultivation to 20 percent of the total rice producing area to increase production. At present, 2.4 percent or 62,743 hectares of the total area of 27.30 lakh hectares are under hybrid rice farming and this was expected to be enhanced to 5.46 lakh hectares by implementing a new scheme at a cost of Rs 417 crore during 2012-13.



A plan has been chalked out to bridge the huge gap between rice productivity in the State and the National average by popularizing hybrid farming as with increase in productivity, the net income of farmers will also increase.

It is estimated that by expanding the area under hybrid cultivation to 20 percent of the total rice, yield would increase to 36.70 lakh MT during 2012-13. Agriculture department has set an overall target of rice production of 78.30 lakh MT in 2012-13, and the yield from hybrid cultivation would account for nearly half of it while covering only one-fifth of the total rice cropland, he said.

The productivity rate was estimated to be 6,765 kg per hectare with winter rice and summer rice accounting for 15.85 lakh MT and 20.85 lakh MT respectively, agriculture department sources have said. At present (2010-11), the productivity of rice per hectare in Assam is 1,983 kg as against national average of 2,240 kg, the sources said. □

LEVEL OF VIOLENCE COMING DOWN IN NE

Though the level of violence in the entire North Eastern region is coming down gradually over the years, the situation in Manipur remains a cause of concern, while, inter-factional clashes between militant groups in Nagaland is also causing concern.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), as many as 498 civilians and 79 security force personnel were killed in acts of violence by militants in the North east region in 2007, but the figure is gradually coming down and last year, 70 civilians and 32 security personnel were killed by militants. The report said that 31 persons were killed in Assam last year by militants as compared to 65 in the previous year.

Year	Killing of SF	Killing of civilians
2007	79	498
2008	46	466
2009	42	264
2010	20	94
2011	32	70

The report said that talks with militant groups like both factions of the DHD and KNLF have been concluded and peace accords would be signed shortly, while, talks are also on with pro-talk faction of the ULFA, NDFB(P) are going on.

The MHA report said that Manipur continues to be affected by activities of large number of militant groups. The militant groups are divided on ethnic lines with competing demands. However, casualty of civilians and security forces has declined in the last few years.

The report further said that surrender of militants in the North East has increased in the last few years and compared to 524 in 2007, as many as 1122 militants surrendered last year. □

Empowering Women in Agriculture

Amrit Patel



Major attributes that contribute to women empowerment are education, social equity and status, improved health, economic or financial stability and political participation

INDIA WAS fortunate to host the *Global Conference on Women in Agriculture* in New Delhi between March 13 and 15, 2012. The conference with the goal of “*Empowering Women for Inclusive Growth in Agriculture*” was sponsored by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and New-Delhi based Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Science (TAAS) jointly with the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), and the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APPAARI), among others. Her Excellency Smt. Pratibha Patil, President of India in her valedictory address emphasized the need to empower women with new knowledge and skills to bring women into the mainstream of agricultural development and reduce gender disparity. Today,

much of the scientific knowledge and technologies does not reach rural women for various reasons. This needs rectification. Research system must also seek the inputs of women as they have historically been the source of much traditional knowledge and innovations. While appreciating the efforts of the National Agricultural Research System for bringing women in the fore front of agricultural research and development, she suggested forming Mahila Kisan Mandals in every village to educate women on different aspects of agriculture and related activities. This paper briefly reviews the concern for women in agriculture at global level and in India, initiatives taken by the Government of India to enhance the understanding and working of women in agriculture and suggests the need to empower women in agriculture in real sense of the broad-based definition of empowerment.

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According to Food and Agriculture Organization (2011), women farmers account for more than quarter of the world's population. Women comprise, on an average 43 percent of the agricultural work force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet women have less access than men to agricultural related assets, inputs and services. If they have easy, timely and reliable access to productive resources as men, women can increase yield by 20 percent to 30 percent, raising the overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 percent to 4 percent. This gain in production can reduce the number of hungry people in the world by about 12 percent to 17 percent, besides increasing women's income.

There is now growing realization and commitment of the global community to achieve more sustainable and broad-based agricultural growth by addressing gender related issues in agriculture through national, regional and global initiatives and partnerships. There is also greater degree of coordination, consultation and convergence of initiatives undertaken by international institutions, viz. FAO, Global Forum on Agricultural Research, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, regional forums and many National Agricultural Research Systems.

Improving the role of women in agriculture has been at the forefront of a Washington based International Food Policy Research Institute's research for the past 15 years.

IFPRI has committed to working on gender issues and its recent gender work includes the book 'Engineering Agricultural Research, Development and Extension' and the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). WEAI, a new tool developed by IFPRI, the US Government's Feed the Future Initiative, the USAID and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative measures the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector. The WEAI is a composite measurement tool that allows researchers to identify women who are disempowered and understand how to increase autonomy and decision-making in key domains.

Indian scenario

As farmers, agricultural workers and entrepreneurs, women constitute the backbone of India's agricultural and rural economy. Yet, together with children they remain one of the most vulnerable groups. Women shoulder the entire burden of looking after livestock, bringing up children and doing other household chores. The extent of health hazards faced by farm women in farm activities include (i) 50 percent in transplanting and 26.5 percent in harvesting under farm activities (ii) 50 percent threshing, 33 percent drying and 67 percent parboiling under post-harvest activities and (iii) 47 percent shed cleaning, 23 percent fodder collection and 27.5 percent milking under livestock management.

Their hard work has not only been unpaid but also remained mostly unrecognized. They perform on a daily basis the most tedious and

back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and homes. They are invariably paid lower wages than men for the same agricultural work. Land ownership titles are most often in a man's name. Men often either take or dictate the decisions concerning farming and women have to compulsorily carry out. Farm produce is marketed commonly by men and that gives them complete control over household finance. More and more women are taking to farming as men are migrating to urban areas for work. But they are not getting access to credit as they do not have pattas. Only 11 percent women have access to land holdings, that too, mostly as small and marginal farmers.

With grossly inadequate access to education and technology, a host of other socio-economic factors have an adverse impact on the lives of women farmers in recent years. Despite their eagerness they have often not been able to take advantage of opportunities from new technologies, innovations and markets. The constraints and opportunities that women face in agriculture vary across the agro-ecological and geographical regions of the country depending upon, among others, the socio-economic-cultural context. Despite many policy reforms and interventions at the macro level gender issues have not received the priority attention they deserve.

India's Initiatives

Recognizing that enlightenment of women will change the face of rural India India's initiatives to empower women include the following.

It has reserved one-third of the seats in village panchayats for women.

Acknowledging the role of women in agriculture India has been the first country in the world to set up a National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) in Bhubaneswar way back in 1996.

The NRCWA, Bhubneshwar has been engaged in developing methodologies for identification of gender implications in farming systems approach and developing women specific technologies under different production systems. Most important research projects in the area of gender study on agriculture and house economy, among others, include (i) development of extension methods for farm women in Easter India, (ii) standardization of women specific field practices (iii) occupational hazards of farm women (iv) improvement of storage practices of seeds and grains (v) reducing drudgery of women in agricultural operations through use of improved tools and techniques (vi) management of coastal agro-eco system affected by super cyclone (vii) involving women in aquaculture to ensure nutritional and economic security (viii) mobilizing Self-Help-Groups to pursue income generating activities in agriculture and animal husbandry and access to marketing outlets, enhance knowledge on various aspects of family life with emphasis on increasing decision-making capabilities, improving skills.

Strategies used for empowerment of women include development of technology kits and media mix for dissemination of knowledge; development of

software; organizing stimulation programmes; conducting outreach programmes through media of mass communication; adoption of one village by each AICRP centre and using Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques for sustainable, self-reliant and people centred development that is socially just, economically viable, efficient and ecologically sound for empowering rural women.

Empowerment process is strengthened through educational interventions, transfer of technologies, feasibility trials and knowledge sharing.

The NRCWA, other ICAR institutes and KVKs have concentrated their researches, *inter alia*, to relieve women of the drudgery by providing time and labor saving tools. Besides, vocational trainings are being conducted to impart skills necessary to undertake different avocations.

KVKs have trained more than 200,000 farm women, girls and women extension workers.

The strategies used by AICRP on Home Science have encouraged women to play key role in micro level planning, designing community infrastructure for information dissemination and mobilization of community resources (human and material) to gain benefits from the projects.

Empirical evidence suggests that women have moved from beneficiaries to active partners in shaping empowerment.

Recognizing the role of women in agriculture Dr Swaminathan has proposed to move the *Women Farmers' Entitlement Bill, 2011* in

the Rajya Sabha that seeks, *inter alia*, access to water, credit and inputs, pattas for women farmers as a policy reform to create enabling environment.

India seized an opportunity to host Global Conference on Women in Agriculture which has called for a radical reorientation of the agricultural research agenda to overcome the existing gaps and to face the emerging challenges of sustainable development and livelihood of resource poor small holder farmers, especially the women farmers. The conference aimed at developing a Framework for Action to integrate and empower women for inclusive growth and development through an enduring global partnership programme on gender in agriculture.

Measures

In order to effectively empower women in agriculture following enabling measures need to be initiated.

Assertive interventions by various departments and Governments are required to ensure that more and more women get access to land holdings. A '*Gender in Agriculture Platform for Gender in Agriculture Partnership (GAP4GAP)*' as recommended by the conference is required to be set up with hubs in different countries and regions of the country to work in this direction. ICAR has a key role to address gender concerns through such platform.

To implement Action Points for full empowerment of women in agriculture that emerged out of conference deliberations, viz. enhanced visibility for role of

women, generation of knowledge and evidence for support and contextualization of global issues to suit local needs. More policy support and institutional mechanisms are required to achieve desired results. Collective action for empowerment of women is required so that they come together on a single platform to march further.

About 36 percent girl students are studying in various courses of State Agricultural Universities. They need to be appropriately trained, their capacity built up and motivated to act as facilitator to empower women in agriculture.

Focused attention should be given to five-point programme as recommended by Dr. Swaminathan, that can make farming intellectually stimulating and economically remunerative for women as well as rural youths, includes (i) land, water and gene care (ii) technology and inputs (iii) credit and insurance (iv) post-harvest management and (v) remunerative marketing opportunities. All these can make farming intellectually stimulating and economically remunerative.

The concepts, innovations and technologies being generated at NRCWA and other ICAR institutes need to be forthwith disseminated widely for the benefit of rural women. Regrettably this is moving at a slow pace.

New programmes should be planned with adequate resources for mobilizing women, forming groups, improving capacity and capability in technical, organizational and commercial (business micro-enterprises) sector and support

systems (credit, inputs, markets). These should be prepared jointly in consultation with women, other organizations (public, private and voluntary) that can potentially complement and supplement the efforts of the State Department of Agriculture.

Banks in India have as on March 31, 2010 have assisted exclusively 38,97,797 women SHGs under their SHG-Bank Linkage programme and 25,13,152 women SHGs under the Government sponsored programme, viz. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana. Most women of these SHGs have been agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers, with substantial working experience in agriculture and animal husbandry. Efforts should be focussed on training them and empowering them as women in agriculture.

Women Empowerment

While it is heartening to note that NRCWA, KVKS and ICAR Institutes have undertaken several researches and facilitated women in agriculture, there is simultaneous need to *empower them in real sense of women empowerment* as is being briefly discussed here.

Empowerment in the literature refers to the act of bestowing power and authority on some one. Thus, women empowerment refers to the conferring of leverage to women who are otherwise deprived. This includes granting to women effectual decision-making power/authority and the power to influence others decisions along with economic, social and civil freedom. Empowerment, by its very definition, implies an increase in the ability to exercise power. In India,

as in most developing countries, women are believed to be and treated as inferior to men. Moreover, as the lives of women and men are embedded in a matrix of unequal gender relations, a decrease in the gender inequality is necessary for an outcome of 'empowerment' for women. In other words, changes such as increased income, skills and self-confidence, may be better understood as enablers that promote women's empowerment. However, the women, in order to be significantly empowered to achieve their perceived goal, firstly need authority at home, which in most cases they do not have. The process should, therefore, be carried out concurrently at home and outside. Within the family they must have equal say as men and so should be the case at work. The most extensive element of women empowerment is providing them with social rank, status and justice. Major attributes that contribute to women empowerment are education, social equity and status, improved health, economic or financial stability and political participation. In India, a whopping 56 percent of the women are illiterate as against a considerably 24 percent in case of men, evincing the striking inequality. This has to be significantly enhanced in a five year time-frame. Educating the girl child is now an integral part of the Right to Education Act in force which should, therefore, significantly enhance the women literacy level at par with men in a five year time-frame. This apart adult literacy programmes should be initiated in villages to contribute to the education in female literacy. □

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Empowered Women, Empowered Nation

Shahin Razi



The empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by economic independence, which implies access to and control over production resources

India has been working towards empowering her women ever since independence, and especially since the 1990s. The government and non-government sectors have both been pushing ahead with programmes aimed at imparting education to women, giving them better health care, providing them with means of livelihood and opportunities to participate in the decision making process at home and in the society. Special attention is being paid to improve the lot of the girl child giving her better chances of survival and opportunities for living a life of fulfillment.

The 73rd Amendment to our constitution in 1993 was a major milestone in this direction. The amendment, besides making provision for reservation of seats for scheduled castes and tribes proportionate to their population in the panchayat area, also ensured reservation of not less than one third of these reserved seats for the women. The impact of reserving

one third of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has been fruitful, and has empowered women both politically and socially. At present, there are approximately 260,000 panchayat representatives in India, out of which around 75,000 are women making it the largest number of elected women in the world.

The Women's Reservation Bill 2010, approved by the Upper House of Parliament is another major step, basically aimed at giving more political space to the women and ensure their active participation in the development process.

While reservation in panchayats or Parliament is important, the real challenge is to ensure that women are involved in the decision making process at home, and in the society. The challenge will be to develop their capacity so that they can perform their roles properly.

But more than half-a-century after independence, shackles remain tightly bound around women's feet. It begins at birth as

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the evidence of female foeticide and gender bias in the richer states of Punjab, Delhi and Haryana shows, sparing neither the villager nor the urban sophisticate. From such inauspicious beginnings comes the sorry story of sexual assaults, dowry harassment and deaths, biased healthcare, low literacy, discrimination at the workplace and subjugation at home – the dismal list is endless and difficult to escape.

Women have always had lower status than men, but the extent of the gap between the sexes varies across cultures and time. In 1980, the United Nations summed up the burden of this inequality : Women who comprise half the world's population, do two thirds of the world's work, earn one tenth of the world's income and own one-hundredth of the world's property.

Statistical data of women all around the world :

- Of the world's 1.3 billion poor, nearly 70 percent are women.
- Between 76-80 percent of the world's 27 million refugees are women and children.
- Women hold only 10.5 percent of the seats in world's parliament.
- Of the world's one billion illiterate, two thirds are women.
- Two thirds of 130 million children world wide, who are not in school, are girls.
- In most countries, women work approximately twice the unpaid time men do.
- Rural women produce more than 55 percent of all food grown in developing countries.
- The value of women's unpaid house work and community work is estimated at 35 percent of GDP world wide.
- HIV is increasingly affecting

women. Today, about 42 percent of the estimated cases are those of women.

- 20 million unsafe abortions are performed every year resulting in the deaths of 70,000 women.

The Story of the Girl Child in India :

Foeticide

- Killing of girl foetus is still rampant in prosperous states with India's sex ratio for girls being 927 for 1,000 boys.
- However only 125 cases of foeticide were registered in 2006 !

Schooling & Education

- Fewer girls are enrolled into schools than boys, both at primary and upper primary levels.
- About 50 percent girls of the total number of enrolment drop out before reaching Class VI.
- Only 36.22 percent girls complete secondary education.

Health & Nourishment

- On the total infant mortality cases, 59 percent are girls.

Marriage

- In low-income groups, 49.78 percent girls are married before attaining the legal marriage age of 18.

Labour

- There are more girls than boys as child labourers.
- A number of girl childs are trafficked for prostitution as well as for domestic help.
- Highest child labour is among scheduled tribes and Muslims followed by scheduled castes.

Kidnapping

- There are regular and increasing numbers of cases

of kidnapping of the girl child.

Concept of Poverty

There is a general consensus that poor can be defined as those who are deprived of basic human needs required for their well being. It is a well known fact that the majority of women in the third world countries are deprived of the basic needs due to so many social customs and male supremacy.

Feminization of Poverty

In 1995, the Human Development Report quoted that out of 1.3 billion poor people living in developing countries. 70 percent are women. Poverty among rural women is growing faster than among rural men. Over the past 20 years, for example, the number of women in absolute poverty rose by 50 percent as against some 30 percent for rural men. Women in India form 89 percent of the informal and unrecognized sector. Women's work participation rate is higher in rural areas, women make up for one third of the labour force of India and 90 percent of the rural and 10 percent of the urban women workers are unskilled.

Women in India

Constitutional Guarantee : The Constitution of India guarantees to all women, equality (Article 14); no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)); equality of opportunity (Article 16); equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)); renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(a) (c)). The Constitution also allows the State to make special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)); and securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42). The Government of India declared 2001 as the "Year of Women's Empowerment" and the National Policy for the Empowerment of

Women came into force from 2001.

Women farmer and Agriculture : India has been an agrarian country. Women constitute about 66 percent of the agricultural work force. Around 48 percent self-employed farmers are women and 64 percent of the informal sector work force depending on agriculture is women. Rural women have, since many centuries, been putting in unfathomable, unbearable and inadequately paid joyless drudgery to earn for their families livelihood and provide food security to country's 1.13 billion people. The plight of most rural women has been pathetic since they have to collect firewood, fetch drinking water, search fodder to feed cattle, work on their meager land to raise crops and work as labourers on other farms, take care of children etc. Hunger and deprivation affect about 260 million people in the country. India is home to 40 percent of the world's underweight children and ranks 126 out of 177 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index.

Self-Help Groups : Self-Help Group Linkage Bank programme has covered 3.47 million SHGs and 45.1 million households. More than 90 percent SHGs comprise women borrowers. Women, despite their unbearable hardships and commitments to their children for food, health and education, have beyond doubt demonstrated their loyalty to financing banks through over 95 percent repayment of loans. Despite this, they have difficulties to get long-term loans and adequate loan of high value.

Elected Women - Representatives : The developed economics of USA and Europe have already demonstrated strict compliance with laws concerning women's rights and status through most effective Law and Order enforcing machinery and efficient

judicial system. Since India is expected to emerge as a super economic power the publicly elected women representatives (existing and future) in PRIs, State Legislative Assemblies, Parliament and Rajya Sabha may need to demonstrate serious concern and commitment to strengthen Law and Order enforcing machinery at all levels, make it effective and accountable specifically in respect of following aspects in which cases it has proved to be grossly ineffective.

Weak Enforcement : Although child marriage has been banned since 1860 and the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, it is still a common practice. The worst feature of the child marriage has been the child widows are condemned to a life of great agony, shaving heads, living in isolation and shunned by the society. According to UNICEF's "State of World Children, 2009" report 47 percent of India's women aged 20 to 24 were married before the prescribed legal age of 18 years, - 56 percent in rural areas. About 40 percent of world's child marriages occur in India. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956, yet cases of immoral trafficking of young girls and women have been increasing. In 1961, Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act. Though all medical tests determining the sex of the child have been banned, India has a high male sex ratio. The chief reason is that many girls die before being born or reaching to adulthood. This is attributed to the female infanticide and sex selective abortions. The dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex selective abortion and female infanticide. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed in 1987. However, several incidences of its violation do occur off and on. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence

Act (2005) came into force on October 26, 2006. Yet the incidence of domestic violence is higher in lower socio-economic classes. Police records show high incidence of crimes against women. The National Crime Research Bureau in 1998 reported that the growth rate of crimes against women would be higher than population growth rate by 2010. Many cases are not registered with police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation cases or inaction on the part of police. Official statistics (1990) showed a dramatic increase in the number of crimes against women related to molestation and sexual harassment at work place.

Female-headed Household : According to 1992-93 year data, while only 9.2 percent of households in India were female-headed, about 35 percent of the households below poverty line were female-headed.

Land and Property Rights : In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names and do not get a share of parental property. Some of the laws discriminate against women, when it comes to land and property rights. Married daughters, when faced with marital harassment, have no residential rights in the ancestral home.

Education : Studies confirm that female literacy has a significant influence in improving social and economic status of women. The female literacy rate is woefully lower than that of male. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in schools and many of them are drop out.

Health and Family Planning : The average female life expectancy in India is low compared to many countries. In many families, particularly in rural areas the girls and women and mothers face nutritional discrimination within the family and are anaemic

and malnourished. The maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world. The health professionals supervise only 42 percent of births in the country. According to UNDP Human Development Report 88 percent of pregnant women (age 15-49 years) were suffering from anaemia. The average woman in rural areas has little or no control over her potential for reproductivity.

Work Participation : Though the country has a large percentage of women workers, there is a serious underestimation of women's contribution as workers to nation's economy. There are, however, fewer women in the paid work force than those of men. In rural areas, agriculture and allied sector employed 89.5 percent of total female labour. Women's average contribution, in overall farm output, is estimated at 55 percent to 66 percent of the total labour. According to World Bank report, women accounted for 94 percent of total employment in dairy sector. Women contributed 51 percent of total employment in forest-based small-scale enterprises.

Empowering Women

The Government of India observes three dimensional strategies for development of women, namely social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice and has made development of women as one of the principal objectives of the five year plans.

The Government has given greater focus to issues relating to women through creation of an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development, initiation of legislation that has taken the country closer to complete legal equality for women, gender budgeting and initiation of programmes for greater inclusion of women in all walks of life.

- The Government initiated the

protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which has given more effective protection to women who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within a family and provided them a civil remedy to deal with such violence.

- The Government initiated the Hindu Succession Act, 1955 to make Hindu Women's inheritance rights in coparcenary property equal to that of men.
- Amendments initiated by the Government have been enacted prohibited arrests of women after sunset and before sunrise, medical examination of persons accused of committing or attempting to commit rape, and mandatory judicial inquiry in case of rape while in police custody.
- The Government has introduced a bill in Parliament to amend the Factories Act, 1948 in order to provide flexibility in the employment of women at night while requiring the employer to ensure measures for safety and protection, and thereby generate employment opportunities for women.

Financial Focus

- The Government has introduced gender budgeting for improving the sensitivity of programmes and schemes to women's welfare. The budgetary outlay for 100 percent women-specific programme has been rising every year.
- Ensuring that at least 33 percent of the beneficiaries of all government schemes are women and girl children has been laid down as a key target in the 11th Plan.

Women's Reservation

- A bill for introducing one third reservation for women in legislatures was drafted. In

an effort to build a consensus, the Government held meetings with all opposition parties and with all UPA constituent parties. Discussions were also held with women's groups and other stakeholders.

Girls' Education

- 2,180 residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Schools have been sanctioned and are providing elementary education to 1,82,000 out of school girls.

Women officers in the Army

- All officers, including those in short service commission, are now eligible to hold substantive rank of captain, major and lieutenant colonel after two, six and 13 years of reckonable service respectively and tenure of short service commission officers has been made extendable from 10 years to 14 years, ensuring parity for women officers with their male counterparts.

Fortunately, the story of Indian women, like that of their sisters elsewhere, has been one of unvarnished courage and sheer grit. Each Women's Day that passes, despite the dingy statistics, there is enough anecdotal evidence of women who have grabbed their destiny into their own hands, expanding the envelope of their achievement. We see these success stories everyday and everywhere at the workplace, the arena of sports and entertainment and, of course, the home.

Women's Empowerment - Acronymed - WE - depicts a unified force. The necessary thought difficult task of building a just and fairer nation is possible only with meaningful partnerships between men and women. To move the chariot of our country forward both the wheels - men and women have to be strong and have to move ahead jointly. □



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Women's Empowerment Across Indian States

Arundhati Chattopadhyay



It is important to realize that there is significant variation in the degree of socio-economic development among Indian states. Hence it is not feasible to develop a single model for empowering Indian women or a single blue print of state policies

EMPOWERMENT is a multi-dimensional concept and relates to the social attainment, economic participation and political participation of people. Further, empowerment being an ongoing process, there is no final goal. One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense. It is always relative and situation specific in context. Because of its complex and dynamic nature, defining and measuring empowerment is a challenge in any development study. More so in case of women, who faced prolonged discrimination that has resulted into gender disparity in the society.

Hence, it is a challenge to define what empowerment means in its own context and to assess whether and to what extent women have been empowered. Some studies suggest a linear cause-effect model while others resort to a more process-based approach. The dynamic process might be

broken into key components for a comprehensive understanding of empowerment. Separating the process into components (such as enabling factors/parameters, agency and outcomes) is useful in identifying policy interventions to support empowerment, and for evaluating the impact of such interventions. Success or failures in development interventions may partly be attributed to approaches that recognise the underlying factors/parameters responsible for empowering women. Therefore, utmost attention needs to be taken in identifying the key empowerment parameters.

Conceptual frameworks for measuring women's empowerment at the aggregate/macro level are less developed as compared to household level. The accepted and most commonly cited are Gender-related Development Index (GDI), a gender-disaggregated Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) by UNDP (1995).

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India has made progress in terms of gender development but the achievements are not uniform across states. This is reflected in the results of two earlier studies namely, State Gender Development Report (2005), by National Productivity Council (NPC), New Delhi and the report “Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure for India” (2009) by Ministry of Women and Child Development (GoI).

Lack of women empowerment has repercussions not only on women but also on their families and society at large. Therefore, this research study has attempted to identify the various factors/parameters that are either helping women in being empowered or retards the process of empowerment. Measurement of progress towards women empowerment at the state level needs to be defined in such a manner that is standardisable, and has a set of indicators that are observable, objective and measurable. In this way a mechanism could be developed to measure empowerment of women, which would be comparable across Indian states and over time.

This study examines the socio-economic and political factors underlying and determining the empowerment of women across 15 major Indian states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Both the earlier studies (NPC 2005 and WCD 2009) ranked Indian states on different women related parameters/variables and

some parameters are common with the present study. However, there are differences in conceptualization and performance measurement of states in all the three studies. This study has a longer time horizon i.e., 17 years and time series data have been used wherever available. However, census data have been used for some parameters like literacy and NHFS data are used for some health related parameters.

Methodology

A large number of factors contribute towards empowerment of women in socially complex and tradition bound societies in India. It is almost impossible to track all of them in any one study. Despite the well-known conceptual and empirical constraints this study identified 32 socio-economic and political parameters that have direct or indirect bearing on the empowerment of women (Table 1).

The parameters are selected based on the availability of comparable statistical indicators and have been grouped under three broad category (i) Women’s Social Attainment, (ii) Economic Participation of Women and (iii) Political Participation of Women. Under women’s social attainment there are four sub factors viz., Demography, Women’s educational attainment, Women’s health status and access to healthcare and finally domestic violence. The classification of the parameters is done based on their nature and not based on any hierarchical order of their relative importance.

In most of the cases, higher value of the parameter reflects corresponding higher level of women empowerment. However, in

some cases (e.g. maternal mortality ratio, domestic violence) higher values imply correspondingly lower achievements with regard to empowerment of women. Thus, while carrying out data standardization special care is needed for these parameters. The data series obtained after standardization is scale free and it has ‘zero’ mean and a standard deviation of ‘unity’. For measurement purpose all the 32 parameters are finally so adjusted that they are positively related to women empowerment. Therefore, higher the values of the parameters for a state, higher would be the level of women empowerment in the state.

To measure women empowerment, a medium term (five years) would be more appropriate than one single year as empowerment is a dynamic process and most of the parameters don’t show substantial annual variation. Accordingly, the study period of seventeen years is split into three sub-periods viz. Period I: 1990-91 to 1994-95, Period II: 1995-96 to 1999-2000 and Period III: 2000-01 to 2006-07. Thus, women empowerment for each state is measured for all the three (sub) periods to track changes in the states’ performance in empowering women over time.

The composite index called State Women Empowerment Index (SWEI) has been formed by combining the six individual empowerment factor indices viz., demography index, educational attainment index, health status and access to health care index, domestic violence index, economic participation index and political participation index. Thus, the

Table 1: State Women Empowerment Factors/Parameters

Empowerment Factors/Parameters	Likely Influence on Women Empowerment
I. Demography Index	
Sex Ratio (No.)	Positive
Child Sex Ratio (No.)	Positive
Female Urban Population as proportion of total urban population(%)	Positive
Women (in the age group of 20-24 years) married by Age of 18 (%)	Negative
Mean Age at Marriage	Positive
II. Women's Educational Attainment Index	
Female Literacy Rate (%)	Positive
Enrolment Ratio for Girls in Primary education (%)	Positive
Enrolment Ratio for Girls in Secondary education (%)	Positive
Enrolment of Girls in Higher education per lakh population (No.)	Positive
Drop out Rates of Girls in Classes I-X (%)	Negative
III. Women's Health Status and Access to Healthcare Index	
Life Expectancy at birth for females (No.)	Positive
Couple Protection Rate (%)	Positive
Total Fertility Rate (No.)	Negative
Maternal Mortality Ratio(per lakh live births) (No.)	Negative
Female Infant Mortality Rate (No.)	Negative
Median age at the first birth for women in the age group of 25-49 years (No.)	Positive
Institutional Births (%)	Positive
Births assisted by health professionals (%)	Positive
IV Domestic Violence Index	
Dowry Deaths per lakh female population (No.)	Negative
Female Suicides due to family problems to total female suicides (%)	Negative
Cruelty by husbands and relatives per per lakh female population (No.)	Negative
V. Economic Participation Index	
Female Work Participation Rate (%)	Positive
Female Labour Force Participation Rate –Rural (%)	Positive
Female Labour Force Participation Rate – Urban (%)	Positive
Women employed in Organised Sector per thousand female population (No.)	Positive
No. of Saving Bank Accounts held by Women in Scheduled Commercial Banks per hundred female population	Positive
VI. Political Participation Index	
Women MPs as % of total MPs from the state	Positive
Women MLAs as % of total MLAs in the state	Positive
Proportion of women casting vote in Lok Sabha Elections (%)	Positive
Proportion of women casting vote in State Assembly Elections (%)	Positive
Women contestants as % of total contestants in Lok Sabha Elections	Positive
Women contestants as % of total contestants in State Assembly Elections	Positive

composite index is a summary measure, which reflects a state's overall performance in empowering women. During the process of index formation the factors and

sub-factors (parameters) were aggregated by weighted average method. The weights used were generated through principal components analysis.

Performance of States in Women Empowerment

Among the 15 states, Kerala maintained its Numero Uno

position in women empowerment, followed by Tamil Nadu and West Bengal maintained the median position (8th) in all the three sub periods. There was no change in the relative performance of the two low ranking states Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, change in women empowerment was noticed in other states. The relative positions of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat in women empowerment were 3rd, 5th and 7th respectively during 1996-2000 and 2001-2007. Andhra Pradesh (4th in 2001-07) has shown continuous improvement in women empowerment. During 2001-07, the relative positions of Assam, Punjab and Haryana in women empowerment has declined where as that of states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were marginally higher as compared to previous years. State Women Empowerment Index (fig 1) indicate that women in the states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Gujarat are more empowered than their counter parts in other states namely, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Performances in Empowerment Factors/ Parameters

In this research study, the performance of the states in 32 women empowerment parameters have been analysed to find out the reasons of higher women empowerment in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu vis-à-vis other States. Further, an analysis of 18 socio-economic development parameters of the states was done with an attempt to identify state specific parameters that require attention while formulating strategies for achieving higher women empowerment in India.

The top two states Kerala and Tamil Nadu have done well in most of the women empowerment factor indices. Kerala maintained its lead in demography, women's educational attainment and women's health status and access to healthcare. Kerala has the lowest drop out rate. The relative position of Kerala is high in economic participation index as state's poor performance in two parameters like "female work participation rate" and "female labour force participation rate in rural areas" were balanced by relatively high performance in two other parameters namely, "female labour force participation rate in urban areas" and "women employed in the organized sector". Further, Kerala is the best performing state in terms of "Bank accounts held by women in SCBs". Women in Kerala also have higher political participation. However, during 2001-07, the state has experienced higher incidence of domestic violence and relative position of the state in two parameters "Cruelty by Husbands & Family Members" and "Female Suicides due to Family Problems" has deteriorated.

Tamil Nadu displayed consistently good performance in all factors of women empowerment. Women in Tamil Nadu have the highest level of economic participation. The state secured 2nd position in three empowerment factor indices namely, demography index, educational attainment index and women's health status & access to healthcare in all the three sub-periods. However, the political participation of women fell sharply during 1996-2000 but subsequently improved during 2001-07. But still state's performance in parameters like women poll (%) in elections

and women contestants is lower as compared Kerala and West Bengal.

The performance of Karnataka has improved marginally in women empowerment factors like educational attainment as well as Women's health status & access to healthcare index and domestic violence index. The position of the state in the dropout rate of girls (I to X) was 7th through out the study. The relative performance of Karnataka in women's economic participation has improved but its position in women's political participation has gradually declined.

Maharashtra achieved (3rd) rank in women's educational attainment index in all the three sub-periods. The state's performance in women's health status and access to healthcare index has marginally improved in 2001-07. Economic participation of women in Maharashtra is higher than most of the other states. But the state's performance is very poor in domestic violence index. The state has no doubt shown improvement over the years in parameters like "cruelty by husband and family members" as well as "dowry deaths". But, the state has very high incidence of female suicides due to family problems. As a result, the state's overall position in domestic violence remains grim.

Performance of Gujarat in overall women empowerment remained more or less the same. During 1991-95, Gujarat got fourth rank in two empowerment factor indices namely, demography and women's health status & access to healthcare. As the child sex ratio is quite low, the performance in demography index has declined. The relative performance in two parameters like

“gross enrolment ratio of girls in secondary education” and “gross enrolment ratio of girls in higher education” is low as compared to Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra. But Gujarat’s performance in “gross enrolment ratio of girls in primary education” is high and improved over the years.

The performance of Punjab and Haryana has suffered during 2001-07 due to state’s poor performance in demography index mainly in two parameters viz., sex ratio and child sex ratio. However, Punjab’s performance in other two parameters “women married by age 18” and “mean age at marriage” is much better than other states. Punjab’s relative position in women’s educational attainment index has been fluctuating. However, the participation of women in economic activity has improved and domestic violence was the least during 2001-2007. Further, the performance of Punjab in women’s political participation has improved substantially.

Economic participation of women in Haryana has marginally increased but the state had higher incidence of domestic violence during 2001-07 and dowry deaths were reportedly higher as compared to other states. The state’s performance in total fertility rate (11th) is low. However, the state with relatively less dropout rates of girls performed well in this parameter (2nd or 3rd rank) during the study period.

West Bengal maintained its median 8th position throughout the study period. The state’s relatively better performances in factors like demography index,

women’s health status & access to healthcare and high political participation have been neutralized by low performances in educational attainment index and women’s economic participation. Literacy rate in the state of West Bengal has improved but relative performance of the state in gross enrolment for girls in higher education is low. The decline in the position of West Bengal in educational attainment index may be attributed to some extent to high drop out rates of girls (I to X). West Bengal’s performance in health parameter like total fertility rate is better than other states. In political participation index, West Bengal maintained its number one position as women poll (%) in elections is highest among the states through out the study period.

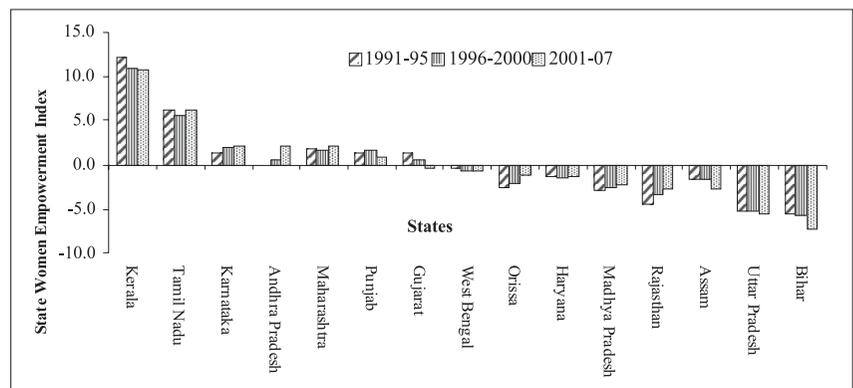
The performance of Andhra Pradesh in women’s educational attainment was low during 1991-95. However, in the later periods improvements have been observed in educational attainment parameters like “gross enrolment ratio of girls in secondary education” and “gross enrolment of girls in higher education”. The state has shown higher performances in terms of women’s economic participation as well as political participation index. The gradual improvement

has helped Andhra Pradesh to emerge as one among top five states in women empowerment during 2001-07. But the state has reportedly higher incidence of domestic violence.

During 2001-07, Orissahad better rank in three empowerment factors namely, economic participation index, political participation index and domestic violence index as compared to the earlier periods. The state’s performance in demography index has consistently improved. However, in women’s health status and access to healthcare, Orissa maintained 10th position through out the study period. The state’s performance in overall women’s educational attainment index is low. But during 2001-07, the relative position of Orissa in “gross enrolment ratio of girls in primary education” has substantially improved and “gross enrolment of girls in higher education” has marginally gone up. The relative performance of Orissa has improved in overall women empowerment index.

The performance of Madhya Pradesh in women’s educational attainment index has substantially improved due to high gross enrolment ratio of girls in primary education

Fig 1: Performance of States in Women Empowerment



during 2001-07. The state's performance has also improved continuously in terms of gross enrolment for girls in secondary as well as higher education. But the position of the state in women's economic participation index has come down as performance in two parameters "women employed in organized sector" and "bank accounts held by women in SCBs" are relatively low. However, there has been continuous improvement in women's political participation and the state's performance in overall women empowerment has marginally improved.

The performance of states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are relatively poor in most of the women empowerment factors/parameters. Both Rajasthan and Bihar have high dropout rates of girls. Women's economic participation is also very low in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, in some parameters these states have also displayed relatively better performances. For instance, Bihar with lower incidence of domestic violence, had better performance as compared to others. The position of Uttar Pradesh has improved in educational attainment parameters

like dropouts of girls (I to X) from 10th in 1991-95 to 6th in subsequent periods. Further, the performance of Uttar Pradesh in women's political participation index has marginally improved. Rajasthan has shown gradual improvements in demography index. Further, the state's performance in women's economic participation and political participation has improved over the years. As a result, during 2001-07, the performance of Rajasthan in overall women empowerment has improved.

But the performance of so-called "BIMARU" states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) along with Assam continues to show poor performance in most of the health parameters. However, in case of Assam the median age of women at first birth is relatively higher and it is one of the best performing states in terms of child sex ratio. The relative performance of Assam in women's educational attainment is declining due to high drop out rate among girls. Further, enrolment in higher education is relatively low in Assam. But among the 15 states the incidence of domestic violence is the least in Assam.

The findings of this study (or any other study) crucially depend on its construct, which includes selection of parameters, study period and the choice of the parameters, weight while indexing. If any or some of these things are changed one may arrive at quite a different result. Besides, the study uses 32 select women empowerment parameters and 18 socio-economic development parameters of Indian States. But given the complexity of the phenomenon and its multi-dimensional character, there could be other variables that might affect women's empowerment.

It is important to realize that there is significant variation in the degree of socio-economic development among Indian states. Hence it is not feasible to develop a single model for empowering Indian women or a single blue print of state policies. Therefore, state specific women empowerment strategies need to be prepared by judiciously identifying factors/parameters responsible for women empowerment in a particular state and accordingly formulating required policy interventions. □



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Women and Panchayati Raj

Nupur Tiwari



Decision making processes in Panchayats need to be better defined, to diminish the possibility of elite capture, proxy participation and single point decision

IT IS argued that women need to be 'empowered' in the realm of political decision making so as to facilitate their 'real' empowerment.

About one million women entered Panchayats after 73rd constitutional Amendment Act. It is a known fact that 40 percent of the elected women represented the marginalized sections and about 70 percent women representatives were illiterate and most of them had no previous political experience. Therefore, it was but natural that there was a widespread apprehension that women will be manipulated by men. However, in spite of several instances of such manipulation and capitulation by women, the presence of such a large number of women in Panchayats has indeed had a deep impact on gender equity. The occupation of the marginalized women of elected seats and chairperson's posts in grassroots democratic governments is a huge social and political revolution, the significance of which would take at least a generation to fully unfold.

There are a huge number of Panchayats working in different circumstances, the extent of empowerment of women vary from region to region and Panchayats work under different legal frameworks – as States have the discretion to define the scope and ambit of Panchayati Raj – every spectrum of political behaviour, ranging from abject subordination of women to remarkable instances of social and political assertiveness can be seen in the functioning of Panchayats. Therefore, examples are merely anecdotes – true only in respect of the instance quoted - and have very little value in terms of deriving conclusions about Panchayati Raj. Surely, an endeavour to broad base democracy on this scale is bound to have shortcomings and setbacks, and would need course correction. However, there is no taking away from the fact that there have been huge benefits, which have not been fully understood or studied, to empowerment and development through Panchayati Raj.

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The constitution prescribes only a minimum level of reservation of one third for women in Panchayats but the States have the leeway to mandate more than that level. Bihar took the bold step of reserving 50 percent of the Panchayat seats for women. Currently, elected women representatives are in place in 54 percent of seats in Bihar's panchayats. Bihar's example was followed by Sikkim, which increased their reservations for women to 40 percent and held their elections under the new arrangement in January 2008. Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand have passed laws increasing the reservations for women in Panchayats to 50 percent. These changes will apply to the next elections to Panchayats in these States.

The Survey Report

A recent survey, commissioned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and executed by the Nielsen Company-ORG Marg under the

guidance of an academic advisory committee, provides many new insights into Social and Political empowerment of women in the new Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This is the largest-ever survey on any aspect of Panchayat functioning, covering Gram Panchayats in 23 states, with a total sample size of over 20,000, including Elected Women Representatives (EWRs), Elected Male Representatives (EMRs), ex-EWRs, official functionaries and members of the community. Nearly three-fourths of the EWRs in the sample belonged to the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and OBC categories, and were evenly divided above and below the poverty line. (See Table I&II)

Reservation has played a significant role as four-fifths of all the representatives got elected from reserved seats. The role of reservation was also evident from the fact that it emerged as an important motivator (43 percent) for contesting the first election as

much as its withdrawal was an important reason for not contesting the election among former women representatives (39 percent).

The majority of the elected representatives had contested only one election (87 percent) and hence the proportion of first timers in politics was also high (86 percent). Around 14 percent were re-elected more than once at the gram Panchayat level. Further analysis showed that the majority of ex-women representatives could not get re-elected because the seat from where they were elected was de-reserved in the next round.

While no gender discrimination in the Panchayat is reported by 60 percent of elected women representatives, acceptability in Panchayat meetings and enabling them to raise issues freely was mentioned by 94 percent. A supportive professional environment evidently motivates elected women representatives to perform better, as 60-64 percent reported an

Table I: Comparison of change experienced by SC & ST and all women representative*

Empowering changes after election	% SC/ST	% All EWRs	Notes on EWR data from Report
Internal reason for poor participation –proxy status, fear, low self confidence, knowledge, compliance to traditional caste and gender roles	72	22.9	Table 4.8, pg 56
Greater self-confidence	55	78	Table 7.1, pg 131
Increased leadership skills	31	69.8	
Family share responsibility for looking after children	39.8	62.4	
More role allowed in family decision making	39.8	68-75	
More respected after the election	58.4	79	
		65	
Able to speak up in their households and Gram Sabha more freely	34.3	67.9	
Greater self-esteem exhibited by SC/ST representatives	32.5	77.1	
Officials accepted invitation to visit panchayat	39.3	43.1	
Officials supported in implementing schemes	36.8	40.8	
Officials took prompt action on women requests/complaints	34.2	40.8	

*Data on SC/ST women representatives from Mangubhai et al. 2009, on All EWRs from the EWR Report (MoPR 2009)

Table II: Comparative involvement of women SC/ST representatives and all EWRs

Aspects of Involvement	% SC/ST women*	% All EWRs**	Notes on EWR data from Report
President/Sarpanch/Pradhan			
Able to work/ discharge the official responsibilities with freedom and independence	Only one third of total 119 presidents surveyed		
Attended Panchayat meeting during their term	52.4		
Called Panchayat meeting	35.3	86	Pg 75, refer to Gram Sabha
		93.6	Pg 108, refer to standing committee meeting
Chaired Panchayat meeting	31.9	93.6	As above
Voluntarily signed resolutions	27.7	34.4	5.22, pg 91
Played significant role in the distribution of development schemes	18.5	55.9	Table 5.23, pg. 92
Vocal in raising issues	26	94.1	Table 5.11, pg 83, refers to Gram Sabha
Ward Members			
Raised issue in Panchayat meeting	52.2	94.1	Table 7.10, pg 137
Issues discussed/ considered	“Few times”	79.7	As above

*From Mangubhai et al 2009, **from EWR Report 2009

increase in their interaction with line departments and parallel bodies.

Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased (68-78 percent). However, issues related to the planning for rural development works and identification of BPL families were discussed mainly by the Male Pradhans and Ward Members.

While 21 percent claimed to be self-motivated, about 22 percent said that their spouse had inspired them, which was higher in the case of women representatives (30 percent). Interestingly, members of community groups (such as Mahila Mandals, Self Help Groups, Youth Clubs, Cooperatives, etc.) seem to have played an important role, as 22 percent of elected representatives reported how they were motivated

to take the plunge in electoral politics.

However, 8 percent of the elected representatives-mainly from West Bengal, Sikkim, Tripura and Kerala-also disclosed the role of political parties in motivating them. Husbands (30 percent) and other family members (12 percent) were reported as playing an important role in motivating women representatives to contest elections the first time.

The economic status of more than half (54 percent) of the elected representatives was above the poverty line (APL) as per the village list reported by the respondents. There were a higher proportion of APL individuals in the case of Pradhans (72 percent), as compared to ward members (50 percent). Almost two-fifths (38 percent) of all EWRs were reportedly, below

the poverty line, the majority of this category being ward members (41 percent) rather than Pradhans (24 percent). This indicates, overall, that the Pradhans are better off than other Panchayat Members. However, not much difference was observed between the economic status of male and female elected representatives.

One-third of elected representatives report interactions with the police, local bureaucracy and officials in the line departments to discuss scheme and participation in elections campaigns. Taking proactive initiatives in signing petitions, participating in protests, alerting media or notifying police/court about local problems was mentioned by 24-35 percent of elected representatives.

That reservation has been critical to the representation of

disadvantaged groups is confirmed by the fact that 88 per cent of them were elected on reserved seats. Approximately 85.8 per cent of all representatives surveyed were first-timers in the Panchayats, while 14.3 percent had been elected for a second or third term. While 15 percent of women pradhans had been re-elected twice or more, 37 percent of the male pradhans had been similarly re-elected. Of the ex-EWRs interviewed, 11 percent said they had contested but lost the election, while 39 percent indicated that they did not contest a re-election because the seat had been de-reserved.

Now majority of women representatives are no more proxy of their male relative patrons. 58 percent of women representatives are now taking their own decisions to contest elections. This is a big achievement. 15 percent of women Pradhans are able to win elections second time. Women belonging to younger age groups of 21-35 years have shown better performance compared to the women belonging to the age group of 35 years and above. Women members of active committees at village level were found to be more successful at Panchayat level. Again quoting the Report, Dalits were also benefited by the whole process. Reservation has inspired and prompted them to contest elections. There can be no greater evidence for the fact that not only has Panchayati Raj attracted women to politics in large numbers, but also that this wish to contest for elections seems to be most keenly felt among the women belonging to the SCs and STs.

Some issues

There is however, big difference between representation and participation. It is easier to legislate representation, but it is rather a complex and difficult task to

create conditions for participations. The proper representation does not automatically lead to proper participation. It is important that they are in a position to influence decision making and prepare and implement the schemes for economic development and social justice.

Results from a nationwide survey of women's participation in Panchayats suggest that a majority of the EWRs report an enhancement in their personal effectiveness and image after being elected. They also report a reduction in household responsibilities. There are many instances of EWR of the Panchayat taking a keen interest and playing a significant role in the workings of grassroots politics. It has often been observed that women prioritize those developmental needs that seem to be more pressing from their perspective. EWRs have initiated work on plans of bringing in piped water in the village and also to build schools as against infrastructural development favoured by men. There are number of success stories where EWR of the Panchayats have taken the lead in making efforts for smokeless stoves, crèches, community halls, and have taken the initiative in family and matrimonial matters, counseling abusive and/or alcoholic husbands. Women are also seen to be more involved in monitoring the presence of teachers and medical staff in the school or health centre, and inspecting nutrition centres under the Integrated Child Development Scheme. Sometimes, women-headed Panchayats have even experienced a dramatic increase in their revenues, sponsoring the auction of village ponds, community forests and village markets for the larger welfare of the community.

A study of Karnataka by Neema Kudva (2003) reveals

that in Karnataka, the reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions has seen mixed results: it has made women more visible, decreased levels of corruption in Panchayati Raj institutions, and increased self-efficiency of women representatives. According to her gender quota is a crucial component of strategies that seek to empower women through increased participation in the political system. All the women who participated in the election or also in the election process are getting empowered. Reservation has at least succeeded in bringing the womenfolk in rural India into the political forum and elected women could now imagine standing against a man in future. This enormous expansion of women's representation in decentralized government structures has highlighted the advantages of proximity, namely the redress of grievance and most important of all the ability to mobilize struggle at a local level.

The issue of surrogate participation of women is one of those popular notions that just refuse to fade away. Yes, in some circumstances, where cultural and the social system is highly patriarchal, proxy participation continues. However, in circumstances where surrogate participation is seen the actual situation might be that the man might be playing a nurturing and consulting role, assisting the new woman entrant into the Panchayats. Further, while surrogate participation might exist for the first elected term of the woman, quite often we come across situations where women have increasingly asserted themselves, once they have gained confidence – even winning the next election on their own worth, rather than as symbols of their male backers.

Some studies suggest that Reservation brings women into

the Panchayat office but cannot really be said to empower rural Indian women due to several factors like illiteracy, language barriers, inexperience or low respect among fellow villagers. These are some of the main problems besetting active participation of women in the decision-making.

In many cases because of lack of availability of forums and lack of proper grievance redressal mechanism for gender related issues, most of women elected representatives in panchayats have very minor role in decision making and mostly they are dummy

As women are still considered one of the neglected categories in some of the regions of India, there should be a separate quorum for attendance of women and for attendance at *Gram Sabha* meetings. In view of the crucial importance of adequate women's participation in meetings of the *gram sabha*, a sub-quorum of female attendance should be built into the required quorum. Moreover, provision may be made that meetings of the *gram sabha* be preceded by meetings of the *Mahila Sabha*, comprising all adult women voters of the village panchayat, to ensure that gender concerns and preferences get fully reflected in the proceedings of the *gram sabha*.

The self-help movement has also had a far-reaching impact on the empowerment of women and several of them who have gained confidence, economic visibility and the strength of numbers through SHGs have stepped into the Panchayats. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in governance of civic society into governance of the State. In this way, they are making the State sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice.

Women's effective participation in the Panchayati Raj or the latter's usefulness for women's rights and development will become a reality only if panchayat system itself operates in a principled, self-governing, and significant way. Aureliano Fernandes (2003) in his paper "*Aggrandiser Government and Local Governance*", found that deficiencies in facilitating the potential of panchayati raj persist at three levels - state, panchayati raj institutions and societal levels." If panchayati raj has to fulfill its foundational tenets of empowering the community there is a need to recognize the primacy of societal good over individual or political goals".

Decision making processes in Panchayats need to be better defined, to diminish the possibility of elite capture, proxy participation and single point decision.

Reservations in favour of women also do not make much sense in a situation where there is emphasis on consensus in decision making because one can just as easily silence the poor as in a consensus the strongest voices prevail automatically. Thus it is easier for a situation of elite capture to prevail if business rules of representative bodies expressly prefer consensus in decision making. The emphasis on consensus in decision making should be approached with caution.

Another issue is the rotation term of reservation in Panchayats. Intervals between the rotation of reservations for women representatives need to be extended. If reservations are rotated after every 5 year term, it leaves very little incentive for the member elected on a reserved seat to perform, because she knows that next time around, there will only be a remote chance

of being elected as she will not have the benefit of reservation in the same seat.

Due to 73rd Amendment over a million women have come out of their homes for the first time to hold public office and to participate in public activities, making their presence in the power struggles once dominated by men. This has been the most effective formal step towards political empowerment of women. There are many instances where women have been self-motivated to fight an election. In several instances, the *Gram Sabha* has persuaded women with leadership potential to stand for elections. The successful EWR, now act as kind of role models for the others. The increased proportion of the EWR has ensured the principles of justice between the sexes and this has certainly led to the fulfillment of certain interests of women, which may otherwise be neglected. Without the system of reservation women would have had no role to play in grass roots politics in India as statistics show, 95 percent of women claimed they would never come to acquire positions in Panchayats, if there were no provision of reserving seats for them (Centre for Women's Development Studies 1999). As with most matters of empowerment, mere political will and articulation of policies will alone not translate into benefits for women. The translation into sensitive implementation would require changes in administrative and social structures. Moreover a collaborative approach between the household, the community, the State, voluntary organizations and the media needs to be developed. The approach must also be multi-pronged, taking into account policies, laws, judicial processes, attitudes and social imaging of women. □

DO YOU KNOW?

SOME FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT, 2005

What is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 ?

It is an act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of Women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Domestic Violence Act 2005 is the first significant attempt in India to recognise domestic abuse as a punishable offence, to extend its provisions to those in live-in relationships, and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse. It extends to the whole of India except the State Jammu & Kashmir.

Why there is a need for the legislation of this Act?

Till the year 2005, remedies available to a victim of domestic violence in the civil courts on grounds of divorce and in criminal courts (vide Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code) were limited. There was no emergency relief available to the victim and the remedies that were available were linked to matrimonial proceedings. The court proceedings were always protracted, during which period the victim was invariably at the mercy of the abuser. The relationships outside marriage were not recognised. This set of circumstances ensured that a majority of women preferred to suffer in silence. It is essentially to address these anomalies that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was passed.

Who are the primary beneficiaries of this Act?

Section 2(a) of the Act will help any woman who is or has been in a domestic relationship with the 'respondent' in the case. It empowers women to file a case

against a person with whom she is having a 'domestic relationship' in a 'shared household', and who has subjected her to 'domestic violence'. Children are also covered by the Act; they too can file a case against a parent or parents who are tormenting or torturing them, physically, mentally, or economically. Any person can file a complaint on behalf of a child.

Who is defined as 'respondent' by this law?

Section 2 (q) states that any adult male member who has been in a domestic relationship with the aggrieved person is the 'respondent'. The respondent can also be a relative of the husband or male partner. Thus, a father-in-law, mother-in-law, or even siblings of the husband and other relatives can be proceeded against.

What is domestic abuse according to the new Law ?

Section 3 of the law says any act/conduct/omission/commission that harms or injures or has the potential to harm or injure will be considered 'domestic violence'. Under this, the law considers physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological, and economic abuse or threats of the same. Even a single act of commission or omission may constitute domestic violence — in other words, women do not have to suffer a prolonged period of abuse before taking recourse to the law.

How does the law protect a person against intimidation and harassment ?

An important aspect of this law is that it aims to ensure that an aggrieved wife, who takes recourse to the law, cannot be harassed for doing so. Thus, if a husband is accused of any of the above forms of violence, he cannot during the pending disposal of the case prohibit/restrict the wife's

continued access to resources/facilities to which she is entitled by virtue of the domestic relationship, including access to the shared household. In short, a husband cannot take away her jewellery or money, or throw her out of the house while they are having a dispute.

What are the main rights given to a woman in this Legislation ?

The law is liberal and forward-looking and it recognises a woman's right to reside in the shared household with her husband or a partner even when a dispute is on. Thus, it legislates against husbands who throw their wives out of the house when there is a dispute. Such an action by a husband will be deemed illegal, not merely unethical.

A woman who is the victim of domestic violence will have the right to the services of the police, shelter homes and medical establishments. She also has the right to simultaneously file her own complaint under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. Sections 18-23 provide a large number of options for legal redressal. She can claim through the courts Protection Orders, Residence Orders, Monetary Relief, Custody Order for her children, Compensation Order and Interim/ Exparte Orders. If a husband violates any of the above rights of the aggrieved woman, it will be deemed a punishable offence. Charges under Section 498A can be framed by the magistrate, in addition to the charges under this Act. Further, the offences are cognisable and non-bailable. Punishment for violation of the rights enumerated above could extend to one year's imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of Rs 20,000. □

Women Self Help Groups

Kahnu Charan Dhir



***It is through SHGs
that the women
get an exposure
to outside world.
The resources
and organizations
which were unseen
earlier become
accessible***

THE “POLICIES of exclusion” of the so called patriarchal societies throughout the world, especially in the Least Developed and Developing countries are primarily responsible for marginalization of women, both covertly and overtly. The practise of exclusion is widespread and it encompasses every sphere of society—political, social, and economic and so on. It makes resources and organizations inaccessible to women. However, of late, it has been realised that the best way to improve the overall condition of the woman-folk is to adopt “policies of inclusion” in which every woman should get a chance to participate in the decision-making process, express her view against exploitation of her male counterpart and get herself involved in the group activities meant for their socio-

economic uplift. These strategies could not only bring about a change in patriarchal outlook in the form of driving them out of the forced confinement to the four walls but also encourage the male counterparts to persuade them to participate in the earning activities, thereby contributing to the family-income, which in turn could tackle poverty to a great extent. It is true, as long as the disadvantaged suffer from economic deprivation and livelihood insecurity, one cannot dream of achieving a prosperous and vibrant society.

Ever since Independence, a number of innovative programmes have been launched for the uplift of women. But the result seems to be far from satisfaction, the prime reasons being improper identification of beneficiaries, lack of participation of women due to strong resentment by their male counterparts in many cases,

The author is from the Odisha Administrative Service and is Block Development Officer, Erasama, Jagatsinghpur District.

high dependence on formal sector credit agencies which are yet to reach the vast majority of rural poor, and the lack of follow up action by the government itself. The problem required a complete paradigm shift where the flexible and responsive system meets the needs of the rural poor. Viewing it in the welfare programmes of ninth five year plan and shifting the concept of “development to empowerment” the Indian Government adopted the approach of ‘Self Help Groups (SHGs)’ to uplift the rural poor.

The Concept of SHG

An SHG (having its origin in Bangladesh) is a group of about 20 people from a homogeneous class, who come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis. They use the pooled resource to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediation including prioritization of needs, setting terms and conditions and accounts keeping. This gradually builds financial discipline and credit history for themselves, as the money involved in the lending operations is their own hard earned money saved over time with great difficulty. Once the groups show their mature financial behaviour, banks are encouraged to make loans to them in certain multiples of the accumulated saving of the SHG. The bank loans are given without any collateral and at market interest rates. Banks

find it easier to lend money to the groups as the members have developed a Credit history. ‘Cold (Outside) money’ gets added to the own ‘warm money’ in the hands of the groups, which have become structures, which are able to enforce credit discipline by being able to save and borrow regularly without many hassles. The groups continue to decide the terms of loans to their own members. The peer pressure ensures timely repayments and replaces the “Collateral” for the bank loans. Based on the studies and the results of action research conducted, NABARD developed the SHG-bank linkage approach as the core strategy that could be used by the banking system in India for increasing their outreach to the poor. At present, there are over 16 lakh SHGs operating all over the country, of them 90 percent being women SHGs. In Odisha, the systematic and formal formation of SHGs got an impetus after the implementation of a state government sponsored programme namely “Mission Shakti” on 8th March, 2001.

Social Mobilization

The first and foremost requirement for any social movement is the role of a catalyst in mobilizing the members, assuring them of an affirmative result and making them well familiar with the possible means to accomplish the task. In conformity with the same, the formation of a Women Self Help Group (WSHG) requires catalyst (s), either from within

the community or from outside who is/are trained to mobilise the women in convincing them or their male counterparts of the possible earnings of the former through group activities. Since the women lack the basic capabilities and self-confidence to counter and challenge existing disparities and barriers against them, it is always required that their males must be convinced first to allow them to get exposed to different resources and organisations outside the home, be that independently or with the help of their male counterparts. Further change agents, if any associated in the process of mobilization are needed to catalyze social mobilization consciously, for any challenge to the primordial social loyalty could complicate the situation. For example, in selecting the members, a homogenous community, say a definite caste group should be chosen. In mixing up different caste groups would definitely raise the eyebrows of the so called upper caste people. Second, the process of social mobilization needs to be accompanied and complemented by economic security. In 2001 i.e. the phase of rehabilitation after the super cyclone in 1999, a good number of WSHGs were formed in the worst-affected Jagatsinghpur district, either through Mission Shakti or through a number of NGOs who were actively involved in the post-disaster relief-activities. In Erasama Block of Jagatsinghpur District of Odisha itself, about 1500 WSHGs were formed in 185 villages, maximum being in

Bengali speaking villages/hamlets. The prime reasons for booming mobilization were narration of successful case studies of SHGs in Bangladesh; the immediate returns that some SHGs could get within a short span of time, thereby standing as models for others to imitate and the cautious enrolment of members from definite castes. Although some development agencies had tried to form composite groups-getting members from different castes, they were not successful in their endeavour.

It is not only the same social background, but also the same economic status of the members which is required for a successful formation of SHG. Women living below poverty line (BPL) and above poverty line (APL) should not be expected to come together. One of the reasons for making 100 SHGs moribund in Erasama Block is due to their faulty selection of members from different economic and social strata of the society.

It is a FAQ whether the SHG should be registered. The SHG need not be registered. We have seen many animators of SHGs running here and there to collect documents for registration with the hope of getting more government aid or loans from banks. However, registration has been substituted by the procedure of gradation, which, undoubtedly justifies the credibility of the SHG. But as a clumsy process, it also requires many paper works. Recently, Central Electricity Supply Utility (CESU) invited application of

SHGs for entrusting them with the responsibility of metre reading, collection of energy charge from consumers and recommending for new connection, etc. The response from the SHGs was amazing. But the criterion of A or B grading debarred many, especially the new ones from entering the final ground of selection.

WSHG—A solid means of women empowerment

It is through SHGs that the women get an exposure to outside world. The resources and organisations which were unseen earlier become accessible. Weekly meetings, weekly savings, internal lending, repayment of loans on regular basis, not only promote thrift among the members, but also encourage oneness among the group members. It is seen that for updating the records, the members very often take the help of their literate daughters or sisters and it is a good sign that some members learn the art of book keeping from them. It indirectly promotes literacy among the illiterate women. Sri Nilakantheswar WSHG of Erasama Block is the example of a successful SHG. It started in the year 2001 with twenty members below poverty line, the caste status being so called touchable. All of them contributed Rs 30/- each. With Rs 600/- in hand, they grinded spices like red chilli and turmeric manually and sold in the village. Gradually, the common pool became rich with Rs 10,000/- within six months. After grading of the group, they could avail of a loan of Rs 2.5 lakh from UBI,

Erasama branch with which they purchased grinding machines of different types. The DRDA officials of Jagatsinghpur helped them in this regard. Within a period of ten years the group owns a rice huller, a power tiller, two acres of land over which stands a two storied building which houses the office of the SHG. The responsibility of supplying Chhatua (a mixed powder of wheat, dal, cashew, etc.) to the Anganwadi centres of Erasama Block has been given to them by the District Administration. Recently, they have taken a village pond on lease basis in which they have grown fishes. Now, each member earns remuneration of Rs 5,000/- per month. They can even borrow money as and when necessary by them. The repayment of the bank loan is very regular. Thus, the members have been successful in reducing poverty of the family. Their husbands who are basically day labourers are very much satisfied with the contribution their wives make to the family pool. Thus, participation in SHGs increases their influence over economic resources and participation in economic decision-making. They take decisions with regard to children's clothing, their education and even entertaining the guests. Getting exposure to the outside world, coming in contact with government officials undoubtedly develops their personality. The discrimination of women in the name of patriarchy is fading away gradually, at least for the members of the Nilakantheswar SHG. Since they have got good access to the administration,

their male counterparts develop cold feet in arguing with them, adds Latika, the animator of the group. Since the members have become economically self sufficient, they have launched an anti-liquor movement in their locality. With their determined effort, a liquor shop, proposed to be set up in their village has been shifted to a distant place. In every decision-making activity of the village, Nilakantheswar SHG plays an important role. Even in observance of the annual Dusserah festival in their village, the decision of the group is final. The members unanimously decide the number of days to be observed, the manner of decoration and the operas or orchestras to be selected for entertainment of the villagers. They are given the responsibility of collecting contributions from the villagers and even from outsiders. Although the group does not play an active role in politics, the political leaders persuade the members to take their sides during elections as they feel that the SHG is an ideal group which the other women try to imitate. Their request to their friends in the village and even in the neighbouring village cannot be underestimated.

Besides anti-liquor movement in the state, some SHGs have taken up some other social issues as and when they crop up. In 2011, a group of village youths from Ambiki village of Erasama Block debarred a Dalit village-boy from fetching water from the Mahanadi at Cuttack, accompanying them to cover the distance from Cuttack

to Ambiki village on foot and pouring the water over the Shiva Linga in the Balakeswar temple of their village. This is an annual ritual which the devotees of lord Shiva perform in every Hindu month of Sravan (July-August). As the news came to the lone Dalit WSHG of the village, the members sat on a dharna in front of the Shiva temple. They did not allow the so-called upper caste boys to enter the temple and perform the rituals. The agitation went on till the same Dalit boy fetched water from a nearby river, entered the temple and poured water over the Shiva Linga. Since that day, nobody musters courage to disallow the Dalits to enter the temple.

Thus, the above case studies justify the fact that it is not only economic uplift of women which is achieved through SHGs but they play an important role in uplifting their status in society. Their role as catalysts in effacing the social maladies cannot be ruled out. On the basis of the WSHGs' achievement and credibility during the recent years, the CESU has given the responsibility of collecting energy charges from the consumers by the WSHGs of Nayagarh, the pilot district. On the basis of their success in this regard the company has been trying to involve other WSHGs of some other districts with this task. But the question arises as to why a number of WSHGs meet their death before time. For example, out of the 1500 WSHGs formed during the recent years in Erasama

Block, about 100 are already dead and another 100 are on the verge of their death. The reasons for this are manifold. Their heterogeneous character, despite the rule that the members of the SHGs should be brought from homogeneous groups is a prime reason for their death. In many cases, the women members are allowed by their male counterparts to join the groups with anticipation of immediate returns. As the process of savings, lending etc, is time-taking, they lose the patience of waiting for a long time. At many instances, the patriarchal dominance over the women plays an important role. In case the wife comes late from the weekly meeting or she stands in a queue along with the males, the husband considers it an underestimation to his status and does not allow further to participate in the SHG. In spite of the apparent success of the concept, still many bankers are yet to whole-heartedly support the groups with credit. The deep rooted traditional mindset of banks which views poor, as credit risks, is difficult to change.

Despite the odds it has been facing since the day of inception, the WSHG-movement has accomplished the task of poverty-reduction to a great extent. It is not a magic wand that the results would come overnight—it requires the hard work and the patience of the members, animators as well as the catalysts. A critical element in expanding SHG movement is to change the banker's attitude that "the poor lacks the repayment capacity". □



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YE-48/2012

Pearl in the Sand – Tara Devi

Dilip Bidawat



Such hand-picked women led Panchayats, if provided with additional human, technical and financial resources, can serve to teach other Panchayats how to resolve challenges successfully

IN 2000, she won the Panchayat Elections on a reserved seat. This came as more of a shock than a surprise in the caste-driven Samarda Panchayat of Khajuwala Panchayat Committee, Bikaner, not only because she belongs to a scheduled caste but also because she defeated an opponent who hails from a powerful upper caste. Tara Devi Baghela was voted to power again in the elections held in February 2010 but this time without any credit to the reserved seat, determined as ever to bring light to the remote hamlets of the desert state of Rajasthan.

Today, the office and the premises of Samarda Panchayat can be seen as an example of efficient governance unlike the Panchayats operational in the distantly located villages. A computer room, wall posters disseminating information on various issues with villagers coming in for seeking assistance, all draw a perfect picture of the

organised office of Sarpanch Tara Devi.

In today's world, when even highly educated people are unable to handle power well, Tara Devi, a high school graduate, has set an example for others. "In the first five year term, I was not acquainted with the works of the Panchayat. I was hesitant to speak in meetings and seminars. Unaware of the schemes, I had to constantly look for help while carrying out the work," said Tara Devi, who has made it a point to maintain good relations with all the communities of the Panchayat and considers it to be one of the major reasons for her return to power.

Tara Devi did not contest the Panchayat elections in 2005. Instead of making her passive, the gap helped her prepare for the certain comeback. Tara Devi, a self help group activist from 2005 to 2010, also joined hands with an international organisation "The Hunger Project" and developed

her leadership traits. She also worked as a trainer in women public representative's training camps organised by the organisation.

Taradevi recalls the milestones of her unusual journey, "During my stay with the self-help group, I taught women more about developing their human resources. I would encourage them to focus on all eight targets of the Millennium Development Goal. I have decided to include this among the objectives in my second term as Sarpanch. Materialistic development is not sufficient."

Her intentions are reflected in the work done by her Panchayat during her tenure – be it health or education, she has done some tremendous work which she is very proud of sharing with her peers, as she believes in the virtue of sharing work that benefits society. During her tenure, 90 percent of the babies in her Panchayat have been delivered in hospitals and 95 percent of the children are vaccinated. 95 percent people registered the births and deaths in their families. "When I took over as the Sarpanch, there was only one ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) in five villages of the Panchayat. I took the initiative to have two more ANMs appointed. Now, we have three ANMs, of which two are always present at the sub-centre," says a beaming Tara Devi.

The government has provided for the services, and associated officials, of five departments under the Panchayats, but the Panchayats don't have any authority over them. With whatever powers they have, Tara Devi's team effectively regulates the actions

of these departments with the help of the Ward Head and Standing Committees.

Tara Devi has her way of bringing discipline not only among students but teachers as well. In Madho Diggi village, when villagers complained about a teacher who was not punctual Tara Devi visited the school for three consecutive days and marked the teacher absent. Now, the teacher is in school regularly, and on time.

For the monitoring of basic services like Anganwadis, Schools, Mid Day Meals and Public Distribution System, Tara Devi's Panchayat has created an interactive committee. Tara Devi herself keeps track of the attendance of every employee of the Panchayat. The record of basic services in her Panchayat is much better in comparison.

"During 2010-2011, we provided 100 days of employment under MNREGA to those who asked for it, and paid their wages too. In MNREGA, under 'Our farm-Our-work' scheme, I have also got 29 Khalas sanctioned for irrigation facilities under Indira Gandhi Nahar Scheme.

63 houses under Chief Minister's Awaas Yojana and 21 under Indira Awaas Yojana have also been provided to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. Similarly, Tara Devi facilitated the pension of thirty five widows, thirty five disabled persons and old age pension for one hundred and twenty people. Under the social security scheme, she proposed names of fifteen BPL families for the marriage of their daughters. The new BPL survey has not been

done in the Panchayat as yet, but Tara Devi is certain that no poor family will be left out.

She remembers, "Women of the village had to walk a kilometre to fetch water. I raised this issue with the local MLA Virendra Baniwal. The new drinking water scheme is prepared with the help of water distribution department and soon the work will commence. This year, I will make sure that this project gets implemented. Through this new drinking water scheme, all the houses will be connected through water connections and women will not have to walk far to fetch water. During emergency situations, drinking water runs short, and in such difficult times water is being pumped from a tube-well through generator and stored in a nearby pond. I built public water stands in three mohallas so that the women have access to water as and when they want it."

Able leadership qualities of Tara Devi have successfully challenged the male chauvinistic mindset of politicians. She became an inspiration even for the nay-sayers. Today, Samarda Panchayat is a model of good governance and human resource development. Such hand-picked women led Panchayats, if provided with additional human, technical and financial resources, can serve to teach other Panchayats how to resolve challenges successfully. Tara Devi walked on the sand guided by no footsteps and has today carved a niche for herself. Her inner zeal shines through, her community happy and contended.

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YE-49/2012

Electric Painting Brush

JAHANGIR AHMAD (19), a young student, from Anantnag (Jammu & Kashmir) has developed an electric painting brush, which is an automatic gadget for painting walls without having the need to dip brush in the paint bucket.

Jahangir's father is a carpenter while- his mother is a house wife. His two younger siblings are students. He has been a brilliant student since childhood, known among his friends for his hard work and practical bent of mind. Jahangir, an eager fellow, is always on the lookout for different kinds of challenges.

Besides studies, Jahangir also has interest in painting and poetry, mostly in Urdu and English. He has a good collection of poetry written by himself, which he doesn't want to show any one until it gets published. He also has written an autobiography of himself as he believes an autobiography helps a man to alienate himself and enables him to look at one's self objectively.

Making the electric brush

While painting one needs to dip the brush into the paint bucket from time to time. This makes the process tedious and cumbersome. Some paint also gets wasted as well as spillover. In order to support his family financially and also partly fund his own work, Jahangir used to work along with studies. One day

he noticed some workers painting a high wall of a house near his home. There was little space to keep the paint bucket and the workers were struggling to hold on tight to the ladder, dip the brush in the bucket periodically and paint the wall properly. Paint had also splashed over to their clothes and body. He sympathized with the workers and started to think what he could do to reduce their effort. He thus got the idea of making the electric painting brush.

The Electric Painting Brush

Jahangir's innovation is an automatic painting device facilitating the user to control the flow of the paint through the brush. The electric painting system consists of a pump operated by one HP motor, which pumps the paint into the brush through tubes, a specially



designed brush with a distributor to spread the paint properly in the bristles, paint bucket with inlet and outlet connected to the pump and an operator belt which is worn by the user while painting.

The paint from the bucket flows into the pump, which pushes it up

to the brush, through the flexible pipes. An actuating lever has been provided to start/stop the flow of the paint into the bristles. The paint comes out at the base of the bristles at four places via the distributor. Jahangir has developed a working prototype with the financial support from NIF through GIAN Cell-JK, University of Kashmir and technical support from USIC, University of Kashmir. Prior art search did not disclose any similar product in the market. NIF filed a patent (1949/DEL/2011) in the name of Jahangir. This brush has the potential for wide application and has good commercial potential.

Other than the electric painting brush, Jahangir has developed other innovations as well, which are described briefly. Electric tester to check the flow of current over an insulated wire itself without cutting the insulation, pedal sewing machine for physically challenged, which has a pedal attached to a wheel, a dish washing machine, a mason helper, vapour releasing fan, which is a light weight mobile cooling device and a wind power generator among many others.

Presently, Jahangir is keeping himself busy in studying celestial theories and has written about them and submitted to different universities including the University of Kashmir. His dream is to establish a scientific lab after working with reputed organizations like the Royal Society, NASA, and BARC etc. □

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YE-44/2012

Amending Archaic Laws to Empower Women

Moushumi Das Gupta



More importantly, broader social attitudes towards fairer sex needs to change if we have to reign in the growing instances of crimes against women

INDIA HAS come a long way economically since the 70's. But this gallop has failed to keep pace with another crucial social indicator that determines a country's overall well being: the status of its women.

Statistics of crimes against women corroborates this view. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data (see box for detail), rape cases have gone up 791 percent since 1971 when such cases started getting reported. From 2,487 rape cases registered in 1971, the figure has touched 22,172 in 2010. Overall, the total incidences of crime against women has skyrocketed to 2,13,585 in 2010.

Antiquated laws

It is not that India does not have laws dealing with crime against women. But the existing provisions related to such crimes in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) are antiquated – framed way back in 1860 – and completely out of sync

with the times. “The existing laws related to rape, molestation and eve teasing are flawed and do not reflect the reality and manner in which women experience sexual assault,” says Kirti Singh, Supreme Court advocate and former Law Commission member.

The 172nd Law Commission report had way back in 2000 recommended many much wanted and important changes to the existing IPC provisions dealing with rape, molestation and other forms of sexual assault. Though based on the law commission as well as a government constituted high powered committee's recommendations, a draft Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill was framed in 2010 it is yet to see the light of the day.

Despite activists, various women's organizations and legal experts pushing for an urgent need to overhaul the archaic laws and give it more teeth by clearing the proposed bill, successive governments have failed to deliver.

The author is a Special Correspondent with The Hindustan Times and writes on women and gender issues.

Need for tough laws to deal with newer form of crimes

With newer forms of aggression against women such as date rape, stalking, cyber stalking coming up, the existing legislations in the IPC related to rape and sexual assault cases have been found appallingly inadequate in dealing with them. An ineffectual legislation has failed to act as a deterrent and the ramifications are there for all to see: a phenomenal spurt in crime against women.

A poor definition of crimes like rape, molestation and stalking in the existing IPC has not only resulted in abysmally low conviction rate but has also ensured that in cases where offenders are caught, they get away with a very lenient punishment.

A stark example is the case of a minor girl who was molested by former Haryana DGP way back in the 90's. Fed up with the harassment that followed, the girl committed suicide while the officer got away with a light punishment, that too several years after the incident was reported.

The 2009 Mangalore incident where activists of Ram Sene, a right wing Hindu group had gone to a pub and attacked women in full public view is another case in point where no strong action was taken against those involved.

According to NCRB figures (see box), in 2010 of the 89707 rape cases pending trial (including pending cases from previous year) only 3788 persons were convicted while 10,475 persons were acquitted. The corresponding figures for molestation are equally alarming. Of the 18, 2736 cases pending trial, there were only 6899 convictions while 16328 persons were acquitted.

Crimes like rape are not defined properly in IPC

Legal experts opine that the primary reason for low conviction rate is the faulty definition of rape and other forms of sexual assault in the existing law. "The present law does not consider other forms of penetrative assaults like oral and anal sex as rape. This despite the fact that penetrative sexual assault is widely recognized

as an extreme form of sexual assault where a women's bodily integrity is violated," says Singh who is also the legal convenor, All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) which has been in the forefront, pushing for overhauling the archaic and weak IPC provisions.

Activists say that it is about time that the government fast tracks the process and bring the necessary changes in the IPC sections that deal with crime against women.

In fact, the amended draft Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2010 that is lying with the Ministry of Home Affairs has taken into account the changing social realities and incorporated several new provisions that as and when enacted would go a long way in empowering women.

Ranjana Kumari, president, Women's Power Connect, a coalition of women's organization says, "There is a lack of seriousness and reluctance on the part of law makers as well as the political class to pass laws related to crime against women. This sends a wrong message."

The bill proposes to expand the definition of rape in the IPC and replace it with "sexual assault" to broaden the ambit of crimes covered. Presently, under section 375 of IPC, penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape but it is now proposed that an act of sexual assault will also cover crimes like sodomy, fingering, insertion of foreign object and other similar offences which do not come under the present definition of rape.

It also proposes to make "sexual assault" gender neutral which will make it possible to penalize offenders of any gender who has committed the crime. The

Box I- Statistics Cases of Crime Against Women that Were Reported/Registered

	2008	2009	2010
Total cases of crime against women	195856	203804	213585
Rape	21467	21397	22172
Molestation	40413	38711	40613
Sexual harassment	12,214	11009	9961
Kidnapping/Abduction	22939	25741	29795
Dowry death	8172	8383	8391
Torture	81344	89546	94041
Trafficking	67	48	36

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Box-II Disposal of Cases by Court During 2010

	Total no. if cases for trial including pending cases from previous year	Convicted	Acquitted/ Discharged	Pending trial at the end of the year
Rape	89707	3788	10475	75295
Molestation	182736	6899	16328	154431
Sexual Harassment	36383	4367	4027	26820

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Box-III Top five cities where maximum cases of crime against women was reported in 2010

City	Cases	Percent of the total crime
Delhi	3886	16 percent
Hyderabad	1964	8.1 percent
Bengaluru	1570	6.5 percent
Ahmedabad	1564	6.4 percent
Mumbai	1409	5.8 percent

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

provisions can be imposed on sexual crimes inflicted on women, men and children thus broadening the reach. The proposed bill also provides for higher penalties for molestation.

Also, the MHA might finally concede to the Women and Child Development ministry's proposal to make stalking a separate offence under the Indian Penal Code, punishable by upto seven years imprisonment. Presently, IPC does not define stalking as a separate offence and such cases are dealt with by invoking section 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and section 509 (outraging the modesty of woman through word, gesture or act) of IPC.

Women activists have been up in arms over the delay. Sudha Sundararaman, general secretary,

All India Democratic Women's Association says, "Given the sensitivity of the crimes that are being committed against women, the government should certainly not lag behind in bringing laws which are in tune with contemporary social realities. It has been quite some time now that the proposed amendments to the Criminal Law Bill are being discussed."

She adds, "Criminals are not bought to book because of weak definition of such crimes and lack of time bound inquiry. There is hardly any deterrence. This has led to a situation where perpetrators believe that they can get away with such crimes."

Home ministry officials, however, say that the bill is in the process of being finalized. "The Criminal Amendment Bill is in the final stages. We have already

circulated the draft cabinet note to stakeholder ministries to get their views. Presently, we are going through the comments given by them. Once enacted, this will go a long way in empowering women," said a ministry official.

However, both government officials and activists admit that making strong legislation is just half the battle won. "More importantly, broader social attitudes towards fairer sex needs to change if we have to reign in the growing instances of crime against women," says Mumbai based women's right lawyer and feminist scholar Flavia Agnes.

Conclusion

To reign in the spurt in incidences of crimes against women, the government and the political class should come on board to amend the existing legislations dealing with such crimes and give it more teeth. The political class will have to display more pragmatism and sensitivity in dealing with such issues. Until that happens India would not be able to achieve its goals on the economic and social fronts and its gallop would reduce to a crawl. □

COMMITTEE TO STUDY STATUS OF WOMEN

Government has set up a 15 member High Level Committee, HLC, on the status of women to undertake comprehensive study to understand the status of women since 1989 as well as to evolve appropriate policy interventions based on a contemporary assessment of women's needs. The Committee will be chaired by Justice Ruma Pal.

The HLC will conduct an intensive literature survey to take stock of published data, reports, articles and research from about 1989 onwards, on the status of women in India. It will prepare a Report on the current socio-economic, political and legal status of women in India. The Report will also bring out the interconnectedness of these aspects in terms of their impact on women and recommend measures for holistic empowerment of women. The Committee will examine the overall status of women including the socio-economic, health and nutritional, legal and political status, disaggregated by rural/urban, economic and social position (e.g. APL/BPL, SC/ST, single women, disabled women, migrant women) and wherever possible by minority status (e.g. muslims/others). The analysis would take account of cross-regional differences and focus on inequalities both within and outside the household. It would also assess the impact made by existing policies and legislative changes on equality, security and holistic empowerment of women, and will identify inequalities in policy and legislation as well as gaps in implementation.

The Committee will examine women's access to and participation in formal and informal paid employment; emerging areas of participation, geographical pattern of their economic activity, unpaid work/ care economy, etc. and ccess to micro-finance, bank credit, training and skill Upgradation, marketing etc. and constraints on increase in productivity.

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YE-53/2012

J&K WINDOW

J&K GETS FIRST PASSPORT SEVA KENDRA

To expedite the issuance of passports and ease the burden on the local passport office, Jammu and Kashmir got its first Passport Seva Kendra in the winter capital, Jammu, recently. We have opened first Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) in Jammu and Kashmir for providing better and faster services to the citizens of the state, said Passport Officer Rajinder Gupta. This is a good news for the people of Jammu, who aspire to get passports and want to avail miscellaneous passport services at a faster pace and better services.

The Ministry of External Affairs has opened PSK in partnership with Tata Consultancy Services at the Regional Passport Office, and the centre will have various amenities for citizens along with ambience and quality of service delivery at par with international standards. As part of national implementation of Passport Seva Project under the National eGovernance Programme (NeGP), PSKs are being set up to provide services in a comfortable environment using world class infrastructure.

PSK will provide services to the citizens of other districts of Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Poonch, Ramban, Reasi and Udhampur. Conceived by the MEA, the PSKs function under Passport SEva Project with Tata Consultancy Services as service provider responsible for setting up and operating 77 PSKs across the country. Of these, two are being opened in the state, one each in Jammu and Srinagar. □

PICTURESQUE NAGIN OPENED TO TOURISTS

The Jammu and Kashmir Government threw open to tourists the stunning destination of Nagin recently, which was sealed off 22 years ago due to its proximity to the Line of Control.

The picturesque meadow, 10 km from the Gulmarg skiing resort and at an altitude of 9000 ft, is a mesmerising fusion of snow-clad mountain ranges, lush green fields dotted with magenta, yellow and white wild flowers and a calm flowing stream.

Nagin was declared out of bounds for trekkers, tourists and civilians in 1990 when militancy had erupted in the State. The towering mountain peaks that surround Nagin to its south are the last patches of land before the Line of Control, located merely 5 km away.

Since 1990 and for many years the Pir Panjal mountain range that surrounds Nagin was a key infiltration route for militants, prompting the Army to seal off the area to all civilian movement.

As militancy began to recede in the recent years, the decision was made to throw open the meadow for tourists. “Due to militancy this area was closed to tourists, now that militancy is on the decline we have decided to reopen,” General Officer Commanding of 19 Infantry Maj. Gen. Bipin Rawal, who commands the Army in this area has said.

The route to Nagin, located on the Gulmarg-Botapathri road, is usually completely shrouded in cloud cover lowering visibility to just a few feet. □

