

**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND THE ROLE OF CULTURE:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN**

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## PREFACE

The image of women in both India and Pakistan have achieved far reaching changes. They fought along with their male folk for the undivided India's independence against the external rulers. But, those women once on the street in procession along with their male folk shouting for the same demand-independence are now back to their kitchens. The changes in the outlook and the condition of women can be seen only in the urban areas, that too very limited. In India, women in the major urban cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkotta, Bangalore have achieved far reaching changes. Likewise, in Pakistan also, only those women in Karachi, Lahore and some other major cities, the position of women is better. However, the whole of the country cannot be represented by these few cities. There are millions of womenfolk in the rural areas of India and Pakistan, still ignorant of popular and general awareness; they are illiterates; they are ill-health, they are subject to discrimination in the name of religion, physical torture and are put under severe restriction. In the name of *honour*, they are kept under the careful watch of their owner- male folk. They are seen as sexual machines and are considered lesser human beings.

The crime against women is in rise, beside so much of attempts to bring them at par with their male counterpart. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there could see material changes in the life of women. The number of educated women, working women, their representation in every other field and in every walk of life has increased considerably. But the backbone of discrimination against women is not yet targeted. The slow rate in the process of empowering them or giving them to participate in the development process is all because of the cultural constraints put against them. Material satisfaction do not guarantee pure equality in the eyes of the society. They are politically and socially far behind their male counterpart.

In the backdrop of this argument, I took up the problem of cultural role in the process of women empowerment. Because the outlook of the society is originated out of the cultural beliefs and practices. No matter how far we have got material success, unless women are look upon as a human being equal to that of man who can feel, who can sense and who can dream, we cannot claim any achievement in the process of empowerment. So, the thinking of the society should be given the best due attention in the process of empowerment. In order to emphasize and identify the cultural constraints, this work is divided into five chapters dealing with conceptual, practical and suggestive aspects in the process.

The first chapter deal with the concept of empowerment and the role of culture in the process of empowerment. it identifies the conceptual relation between the two and it also highlight some physical changes of the movement taking place in the two countries. This chapter is mostly conceptual.

The second chapter seeks to identify and differentiate the cultural practices and beliefs of these two countries from the other countries. It also focus on identifying the area of problem.

The third chapter deal with the identification of women with culture. The chapter study the cultural symbolic significance of women. And it also identify the area of constraints attached to the figure. It is an attempt to trace the figure of women in the culture.

The fourth chapter deal with the problem of transforming cultural outlook through imparting proper education and rising the level of living standard. It discusses the role of education in the process of transformation and the role of economy in rising the level of living standard.

In the fifth and the concluding chapter discuss the importance of evaluation of the processes undertaken towards empowerment of women. Some NGOs are also taken as example in the chapter. The chapter also discuss about the constraints, problems, possibilities and the changing aspects of what is involved in the process of empowerment.

## CHAPTER – I

### CULTURE IN THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT

#### Introduction

*A hand that cradles can rule the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Man and women are the two sides of the same coin. In every prosperous society man and women have same social responsibility and work together. Women constitute the most important element of the human race. However, women all over the world suffer from degradation, indignity, oppression, violence and discrimination in every way of life. The overall development and progress of a society and the whole world as well depends a lot on women. However, they deserve the place where they are supposed to stand in the society. The denial of rights to women has been often defended by various cultures and religions of the world. But the fact is if women are devoid of their share in the overall development of a society, there is no development in the pure sense. So, women should be integrated in every aspects of life in an equitable and just manner.

India and Pakistan have similar social and cultural structure with minimum differences. It can be said that except the state, the people in every aspect possess similarity of culture. Pakistan is mini-India, absent the majority Hindus. The Muslims in India follow the same religious tradition that is followed by the Pakistanis. The only dividing lines are the language, ethnicity and the state. The South Asian subcontinent is considered to be the least gender sensitive region in the world. The sex ratio is 105.7 men to every 100 women. In India and Pakistan, religious taboos, customs and traditions play a decisive role in the society and in relation to gender. *Dowry system, wife beating, polygamy, sexual assault, teasing etc*, are common social practices. These social practices are against the notion of gender equality. It puts down women's self or human dignity in the society and under the male counterpart in marriage, property, custody of children, restrictions based on taboos, customs and traditions are the socio-religious factors that completely imprisoned the prospect of women in India and

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<sup>1</sup> Hemalata H. M., 'A Hand that Cradles can also Handle the Panchayat,' *Kurukshetra*, Vol. 51, No. 5, March 2003, p. 9

Pakistan to come up in the society and bring gender equality. Exploitation of women is a common phenomenon in every society and they are exploited in different patterns in different societies. However, the condition in India and Pakistan is foreign to other part of the world. So, the problem attracts considerable attention.

### **Concept of Women Empowerment**

The word *empowerment* is a complex phenomenon, which takes different forms in different spaces of women's lives. This diversity in defining the term complicated the hidden idea of empowerment. The dictionary meaning of 'empowerment' is power delegation, something which one person upon another can bestow. However, this meaning is one sided and instrumentalist in nature. The concept has much more wider meaning than this. Women Empowerment is a concept that aims at bringing women into development and to be empowered, so that they can also participate in the social, political and economic decision-making. Empowerment concept is not a restricted form. It is a multifaceted concept, ranging from self-identity to social identity. Empowerment is a process that involves the question for quest of social justice. It means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfill their desires, wishes, capacities as an equal member of the society, it is psychological sense of individual control. Development of the sense of *self worth* is the first target towards the movement and exercise the right to organize one's own self, and obtain necessary resources of it too. There are numerous strategies to the process of empowerment like empowerment through education and training, participation in politics, cultural assimilation etc.

Explicit and concerted efforts to put women on the international development agenda began in the mid 1970's. The United Nations declared 1975 as the 'International year for women's' And at the International Conference (Nairobi 1975), women from the developing and the underdeveloped countries introduced the concept of *empowerment* as a counter project to the integration concept for advancing women. Various organizations all over the world have been fighting for the cause of gender equality with the ideology that women are being oppressed, suppressed, and depressed. But the success is not yet seen. The modernization process has not benefited the movement for lower strata are still the same. The Gender Development Index (UNDP) shows poor performance of the initiative towards gender equality. It is an acute form of poverty,



because poverty is not only the lack of income but also lack of access to services and opportunities for human development. The new developments and new changes in and around this struggle compel to shift the priorities of the movement in order to suit the changes and keep the founding ideology intact.

The concept of empowerment was introduced by women from the South at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985 as counter-project to the integration concept for advancing women.<sup>2</sup> The empowerment concept made clear the political and economic gap between North and South between social classes and between men and women. It aims at a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women based on a development strategy, which is no longer oriented on growth, the world market and military power.

The concept has had seemingly record acceptance in the executive suites and programme of the UN and governments while at same time its substance has been drastically diluted. Taken on board hook-lined and-sinker by official policy; its politically critically teeth-namely posing the power question – have been extracted. It now has no bite critical of development and social policy. It just stands modestly and harmlessly for every strengthening and participation of women.

Women's movement has modified its goals according to the need of the time, and in relation to the stages of development. The present day feminist movement has not emerged in a vacuum; the seeds were planted by our mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers who fought for women's rights as strong individual women, as part of the movement for the right to vote or for education of women, as part of social reform movements, workers movements, independence and national liberation struggles<sup>3</sup>. Among the liberation struggles mention can be made of the women who have played significant role in revolutionary movements, from the march of over 5,000 women to Versailles (France) in 1789, one of the major events of the French Revolution, to the twentieth century liberation movements. While women movements

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<sup>2</sup> Laisom Chanu Seeleima, *Women's Organizations and Search for Equal Status: A Case Study of Meetei Women in Manipur*, M. Phil Dissertation submitted to CPS/SSS, JNU, 1999, New Delhi, pp. 21-9.

<sup>3</sup> Marijee, Kari, *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making*, Women and Development Series, Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey, 1995, p. 32

continue to be associated with the struggles for equal pay for equal work, right to abortion, the practice of birth control, the right to determine one's sexuality and other visible marks of gender inequality. On the whole, present day feminist movement is a struggle for the achievement of women's equality, dignity and freedom of choice. It battles to ensure that women have control over their lives and bodies within and outside the home. Hence the general aim is not only to achieve equal rights but to transform all oppressive relationships in society.

### *Emergence of Liberal Feminism*

The first wave of women's movement was inspired by the philosophy of liberal democracy, particularly its emphasis on individual autonomy. The conceptual tools for demanding freedom of choice and the right to determine one's own desires, needs and interest was provided by the philosophy of liberalism. The liberal feminist used the idea of equality to demand equal rights for men and women. The struggle was for democratic rights of women. It included the right to education and employment, the right to own property, the right to vote, the right to enter Parliament. They fought for legal reforms for an equal position in law and society.

In the history of liberal feminist thought, although the French Revolution did little to further the emancipation of women in France, the ideas behind the revolution were important in the development of feminism in England and USA (the forerunners of liberal feminism).<sup>4</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' was the one of the earliest statement about equality of women in England. Her writing remained an important ingredient in equal rights feminism throughout the whole of the twentieth century and has had a profound influence on feminist thinking down to the present day.<sup>5</sup> Olive Banks says that in America the workings of the 'Declaration of Independence' was the inspiration for the feminist principles that emerged from the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. It is widely regarded as the beginning of organized feminism in USA and it arose out of a renewal of friendship between Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton when the Motts visited friends at Seneca Falls. Out of the paraphrase of the 'Declaration of Independence' the authors claimed that men and women are created equal and share in the inalienable rights endowed by their creator.

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<sup>4</sup> Olive Bank. 1981. *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

They applied the language of natural rights to the relationship between men and women and laid claims to the equality of sexes that was at the centre of campaign for equal rights feminism.

Organized feminist movement came into existence in Britain only in 1856. Various feminist writers started working on women's problem through the formation of committee and by publishing journals. The main issues that were of immediate interests to the movement were property rights of married women, employment of women, higher education for girls, right to vote and other associated problems faced by women in society. Questioning the doctrine of the unity of married couples, these feminist argued that without a legal identity of her own, a deserted or ill treated wife was unable to use the law to defend her interests. Within marriage she had no rights over her own person, her own property, her earnings, and even her own children. Commenting on this J.S. Mill described the authority of the husband over the wife as domestic tyranny comparable with that of the power of absolute ruler over his subject or that of a slave over his slaves<sup>6</sup>. But if we look deeper the struggle to change the legal position of married women was only one of the issues that occupied the early years of the feminist movement. More important than this was the struggle to increase employment opportunities for women and as a necessary prerequisite to this, the need to improve the educational qualifications of those seeking employment.

Liberal feminism in the early years focused on the concept of equality in the civil and political sphere. However, later on they extended it to areas of female experience formerly viewed as private and untouched by traditional programmes. It demanded child care facilities and control over one's own reproductive life as a basic right for all women. Issues of sexuality and sex division of labour in housework were also raised.<sup>7</sup> In each of these spheres, liberal feminists wanted equal rights to men and they saw this as a source of their empowerment.

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subject of Women*, Frankau, London J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., Aldine House London. 1955, p. 247.

<sup>7</sup> Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, Pluto Press, London, 1983, p. 47.

### ***Radical Feminists Movement***

Radical feminists celebrate feminine values and traits, such as, nurturing and closeness to nature. They stress on the need to respect, value and incorporate these attributes in all aspects of social and political life. They also identify patriarchy, or pervasive male domination of society, as a root cause of women's oppression.<sup>8</sup> Radical feminism, or the women's liberation movement, began early in the 1960's, when small groups of women activists in the civil rights movement began to be conscious of the limited role assigned to women in the movement and in particular their exclusion from decision making and their relegation to domestic and other auxiliary chores. The attempt by these women to raise the issues of women's rights had met with a refusal to listen to their arguments. As a result of the humiliation that some of them had experience personally at the hands of men, they sought new allies.

Radical feminists have replaced the struggle for vote and for legal reform with the demand for the destruction of patriarchy. Their main contention is that the roots of subordination lies in the institution of family, the hierarchical sexual division of society and sex roles themselves. Biological differences, in their view, have been translated into male domination over women. To fight against this, they emphasize freedom of sexual preference, control over one's body, free sex experience and collective child care. In addition to it radical feminists stress the need to build solidarity among women and to make women self reliant so that they are not dependent on men in any sense. Radical feminism attempted to shift the perception of society, to restructure it in terms of a radically new set of woman-centered meanings. It aimed to recast personal identities, to reclaim language and culture from their masculine forms, to relocate significant political power to reassess human nature and to challenge traditional values. Radical feminists emphasized that feminist goals cannot be achieved without changes in the relationship between men and women, and this entailed the transformation of traditional sex roles and traditional family structure.

### ***Socialist Feminism***

The Socialist Feminism emphasizes the interconnectedness of the oppression of women with oppression based on class, race and other social, cultural and political factors. Women's inferior status in their view is rooted in private property and class

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<sup>8</sup> Marilee Karl. 1995. Op.cit, p. 34.

divided society. The overthrow of the capitalist system by itself will not mean transformation of patriarchal ideology, what is needed is a struggle against capitalism and patriarchy. Socialist Feminist writer Mitchel differentiates women's condition into four separate structures: production, reproduction, socialization and sexuality.<sup>9</sup> Each structure develops separately and requires its own analysis, but together they form the 'complete' unity of women's position. In the area of wage labour she observes that the most elementary demand is not the right to work or the right to receive equal pay for work but the right to equal work itself. Some socialist feminists speculated that family in spite of being associated with reproduction, sexuality and the realization of children, also serves ideological, biological as well as economic functions. Even if a socialist mode of production requires the end of the family as an economic unit, it cannot end the family as an ideological and biological unit. Women's oppression will persist unless our psyches have a revolution equivalent to the economic one that effects the transition from capitalism to socialism. The main thrust behind this is that, even after the end of the struggle for 'class', inequality will still persist. The need is to fight against gender inequality and gendered biases. The focus of this changed ideology lies in understanding female hood in the family and the initiative to bring them out of the traditional life inside the four walls under the eyes of their male head and at the honour of the family.

### **Political Empowerment**

Democracy encourages the scope promoting gender equality. However, democratic structure being influenced, reflected, and determined by history, culture, and determined by history, culture and social economic, political and psychological element of society, has more constraints in achieving equality in all walks of life. Democracy is a form of political system, governance is an institution to implement its principles and gender is a part of governance to be ensured by equal participation of men and women.

Women share half the burden and problems of men, suffering economically or politically, as well as from whatever social or communal discrimination there may be, but over and above they have the disadvantage of being women. Society remains male

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<sup>9</sup> Diana H. Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 1988, p. 242

dominated even at the end the twentieth century. An increasing number of people, including men are realizing what Mahatma Gandhi stressed: namely that no movement, no programmes can succeed if half the population is kept out. So women's participation is an essential element of human development. Because by participation women are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affect their lives.

People started to urge, and are impatient to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives.<sup>10</sup> Women are the major contributors in people's participation. They not only comprise the majority of those excluded from participation, but now they play a leading role in the emergence of groups, organization and movements worldwide, and are becoming increasingly active in their communities, governments and international arena. The importance of women's participation can be looked from various angles. Without equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making, no true democracy and no true people's participation can be established. Women's full participation is very much required in the development process and the goals targeted. The participation of women helps in focusing attention on the most neglected portion of the humanity (women and girl children). It will help in the process of changing the unequal balance of decision making power and control in the relations of men and women in the household, in the workplace, in communities, in government and in the international arena. But inspite of the importance of their equal participation, most of the women are still behind four walls of the house. They seldom hold top positions and power in almost all the societies. In order to help in answering the question of women's oppression, various feminist<sup>11</sup> movements come up with the common aim of equality in family and society, the right to one's own body, the opening of wider opportunities for self development and a refusal to be regarded merely as sex symbols.

As far as political empowerment in India is concerned we have seen changes in the past few years. The introduction of the Panchayati Raj has brought about changes in the socio-economic condition in the villages. This was partly due to women participation in the decision making process. Political participation is a human right;

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<sup>10</sup> Marilee, Karl, 'Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making (Women and Development Series) Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey, 1995, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to the *Human Development Report 1999*, women hold only 12.7 percent of the world Parliamentary seats and only 8.7 percent of those in the least developed countries.<sup>12</sup> In India the political empowerment of women was through reservation in the local elected bodies has helped in the wider mobilization.<sup>13</sup>

Caste and class barriers were narrowed down through popular awareness and popular education. *Purdah* system and shyness among village women had started disappearing. They had acquired courage to express their views both in formal and informal gatherings. The women started showing keen interest to learn more about Panchayat administration and community development. These changes amongst the women brought respectability for them in the community. With the help of the field staff they started taking initiatives to solve problems in the community. The women acquired the confidence to share their experiences and also learn from their peers. They were encouraged to meet higher authorities of the government and represent their problems before them. There is a wind of change in the Panchayats as the women are acting as 'an agents of changes.'

The women's movements were also advocating 33 percent reservation in the highest legislative bodies. A space must be created for the women's voice to be heard. Since most women are affected by the infrastructural inefficiencies and inequalities, which includes, lack of health care, an insecure law and order situation that leave women as the worst victims. So is it not essential that those who are at the receiving end should have a voice in the decision-making prove of the country? What democracy can we advocate when 50 percent of the population's voice is not heard in the parliament.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, it can be rightly said that for women to take their just place in society, it is important to ensure-legitimate political participation, their voices are present in the decision-making. Property laws are reviewed to do away with anomalies in the law, discrepancies between statutory law and customary law. Women should have equal access to educational opportunities and gender sensitivity at all levels of society.

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<sup>12</sup> Human Development Report. United Nations Development Programme,(New York, 1999)

<sup>13</sup> Hemlata H. M., op.cit., pp. 9-14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p 9-10.

## **Cultural Implications of Women Empowerment:**

The importance of culture of a particular place in the study of women empowerment stands high. It is because the overall behaviour of the individual, irrespective of men or women, and the society as a whole is determined by the culture of the particular place. For example, the eastern culture stands different from that of the Western Christian culture. This is one of the macro difference that exist in two sides of the world and the others stands within.<sup>15</sup> There are numerous other sub-cultures with distinct and different cultural behaviours. They have different outlook and different treatment towards gender question. Some are linear towards women and are very severe towards women. This variation of treatment towards women in different places and different cultures identify the importance of cultural factor in dealing with the question of gender empowerment. Here we are generally confused with the term and culture and often ask what are the links or what culture has to do with gender. So, we need to define culture in one hand and gender on the other hand and afterwards combine these two to understand the problem of culture in the process of empowerment.

Culture is the way of life, general customs and belief of a particular group of people at a particular time.<sup>16</sup> It's the way of thinking and behaving, the continuous traditions of arts, music, dance, literature etc. of a particular society or group within a society. Culture can be taken in two different meaning; positive and negative meaning. When we talk of a cultured man or woman, we assume or perceived that the person's behave; moral and character must be good. Good in the sense, he is not harmful to the society in any way and is within the expected general social norms. But when we talk about the cultural behaviour of a particular society, there are lots to take into account. Alcoholics, intoxication, prostitution, murder so and so are considered as bad and anti-social. But they are still part of the general social character or constituents of the and within the particular cultural behaviour of the society.<sup>17</sup> The most important thing is identifying what stands for what and in what way a particular society is entitled good or considered bad. It is very difficult because, people's conception towards any thing or the way of thinking and perceiving things of a society or a group of people is different from the other one, there are hardly similarities. Even within a sub-group and among families

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<sup>15</sup> Pramod Mishra, *Women in South Asia: Dowry Death and Human Rights Violations*, Authors Press, Delhi, 2000, pp. 1-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Laisom Chanu Saleima, *Women's Organizations and Search for Equal Status: A Case Study of Meetei Women in Manipur*, M. Phil. Dissertation, CPS/SSS, JNU, New Delhi, pp. 30-48.



and individuals there are differences. However, there are conceptual and behavioural similarities through which the general or group hypothesis is being made possible and common things are generalized.

There are not much to explain about gender and its meaning. When we talk of gender, the question of man and women, and their relation always comes forward. In discussing the gender relation, the agenda of deprivat, suppression of women in the society comes up. It is all because woman is considered a lesser human being in every society. But the human society is not complete without this lesser human being. So the question of women emancipation and women empowerment comes up now and then but not as permanent mission into the mind of human world. It can be considered a process of correcting narrow conception of gender relation.

My argument in bringing culture or cultural mindset while talking the general conception of gender relation is an attempt to identify and classify the general cultural attitude towards women particularly in India and Pakistan. There are concrete differences between these countries and other countries in other part of the world. It is true that the thinking and living culture of every society depends upon the socio-economy and geo-political environment. In these two countries, religion plays the most important deciding factor in dealing with gender. Religion is the overall foundation of the cultural mindset in these two countries. Here we again stumble in the argument by inclusion of religion. However, the importance of religion comes up now and again when we talk of culture or the so call cultural mindset on which the argument is being made. The cultural mindset develops out of the religion in South Asia. The way in which women are looked upon under the framework of this mindset is the focus of this work.

### **A Brief Background of the Historical Evolution of Women in India and Pakistan**

The position of women in a society is the true index of its cultural and spiritual attainment<sup>18</sup>. In the Rig Vedic age, women enjoyed a high position. They full freedom for spiritual and intellectual development. Vedic literature has references, which recommend the insurances of the birth of a scholarly daughter. Daughters like sons were

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<sup>18</sup> Fatima, Hussain, *Women's Empowerment: A Historical Profile in India*, Women Empowerment, New Delhi, July-September 2003. P.37

initiated into Vedic studies and had to lead a life devoted to learning self-control and discipline. Many women rose to become Vedic scholars, debaters, poets and teachers. Women married at a mature age and were equal partners of their husbands in the performance of spiritual and temporal duties.

The society grew complex, the four *Varna* system based on occupation was replaced by the *Varna* system based on birth. In the process, the status of women got reduced to that of *shudras*.<sup>19</sup> Women ceased to be productive and their position became secondary. At taboos concerning smell and touch crystallised, women were forbidden to participate in religious sacrifices as unclean and untouchables during menstruation and childbirth. Smriti writers like Manu; Yagnavalkya etc. issued mandates to discontinue the practice of *Upnyas* for daughters, which adversely affected their education. Manu propounded the theory of the perpetual tutelage of women, along with other social taboos resulting in inhuman customs. The emergence of feudalism also relegated the status of women to that of property.

With the advent of Islam in India, the status of women became worse, as by the time Islam reached India, the males of the community had started interpreting Islamic injunctions selectively to suit patriarchal needs. Notwithstanding this, Raziya Sultan and Nurjahan had played a key role in shaping medieval Indian politics.

With the advent of British rule in India, a unique fusion of Western and Eastern thought took place. This gave an impetus to the rethinking of values. Indian socio-religious reformers, who launched the campaign against social evils, especially relating to the treatment of women, took up a challenge to expunge child marriage, female infanticide, *purdah* system, sati, subjugation of widows, etc.

In this direction, some Christian missionaries tried to persuade the British government to abandon the policy of neutrality on Indian social issues and urged to legislate against the evil social customs. The idea of imparting education to Indian women by establishing exclusive schools for women originated from the missionaries in 1819. English education opened a whole new world to the Indian women, a world of

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<sup>19</sup> *Varna* is the caste system of Hindus where *Shudras* form the most backward or the lowest caste according to the Hindu interpretation.

social purposes, coloured by the ideals of liberalism, humanism, liberty and equality<sup>20</sup>. The British government under William Bentinck, abolished *sati* in 1829, later female infanticide was banned, and in 1856, the Widow Remarriage Act was passed.

Ironically, it was men and not women, who initially took up the cause of women's empowerment in India. The forerunners in this field were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, Keshab Chandra Sen, M.G. Ranade, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand, Virsalingam Pantulu, Syed Ahmed Khan, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, M. K. Gandhi, etc. It was clear that the national progress could not be achieved without the progress of women. Although men were first to take up the cause of the women closely followed and organised the work for their emancipation. Leading women were Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Ramabai Ranade who presided over the Arya Mahila Samaj (1862-1924), Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887), Francina Sorabjee, Annie Jagannathan and Rukmabai. Though, they were unable to completely emancipate and empower Indian women, they did succeed in sowing the seeds of the women's movement in India.

### **Emergence of the Modern Concept of Empowerment in India and Pakistan**

With the advent of the twentieth century the scope of women's movement in united India demands for equal status of political rights found general expression through various women organizations. The trend towards feminism suddenly found powerful response in the country and the movements for liberation grew with remarkable vigour and audacity.

The united Indian womanhood began from about 1885 with the formation of Indian National Congress.<sup>21</sup> This was the first times that women's movements took shaped, which were till now expressing through individual efforts and aspirations, acquired an all-embracing collective character. When Mahatma Gandhi entered the political scene, Indian women joined the National Movement. After the partition of Bengal, Gandhi gave a call to women to come forward by defying all social and cultural

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<sup>20</sup> Manu Bhaskar, *Women and Political Consciousness*, in Susheela Kaushik (ed.), 'Women's Participation in Politics,' Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 72-76.

<sup>21</sup> Snehlata Pande, *Political Efficacy and Political Participation: A study of Women's Involvement in Politics in India*, in Susheela Kaushik (ed.), op.cit., pp. 77-84.

taboos, sacrificing physical comforts and denying the validity of all unreasonable restrictions and take up national political struggle. Gandhiji's unique contribution was the awakening of the immense untapped power in Indian womanhood. The movements for political suffrage for women, even as early as 1917, the arguments of Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Herabai Tata and Mithan Tata were so convincing that the British parliament decided to consider the question of women's suffrage a domestic subject, to be settled by Indian provincial legislation. By 1929, the vote was one of the links making Indian womanhood a vital unit in the life of the country. After the First World War, a new category of Women's organizations began to emerge. These carried a definite programme of social work, education, and infused a spirit of nationalism. As a result of the women's movement in united India, women could secure an opportunity to question their equality of status with men in the society. However, after the partition of united India in 1947, women's movement slowed down and lost its somewhat frenzied pace for quite long time. Nevertheless, the women's movement for empowerment continues its steady march forward.

By late 1970's, various women groups were formed. Several factors were responsible, including the Indian Government Report in 1975 (International Women's Year). The report of the 'National Committee on the Status of Women' gave a boost to the formation of many informal women groups in India. The document portrayed the conditions of women including low and declining female participation in the labour force, high unemployment and underemployment of women, an increasing literacy gap between men and women and the declining sex ratio in favour of males. The report attributed these developments to the process of modernization and uneven development that has deprived women of their traditional productive roles and protection. Women have become devalued and subject to violence.<sup>22</sup> The other most important factor was the experience of women's activists in the protest movement. Women activists addressed women's issues, while male activists worked on the more important class or caste issues. And in spite of everything women's oppression was seen as secondary to class oppression. So, new consciousness of women and on women's issues concretized into a host of small voluntary women's groups. It was also concerned with violence on women. Rape and battery, divorce, maintenance and child custody, further legislative

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<sup>22</sup>Jodi Dean (ed.), *Feminism and New Democracy: Resisting the Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1977, p. 112.

reforms, spreading of educational facilities and along with these the attack on sexist and stereotyped text books. Equality not only equal work, but equal opportunities to work and with equal pay. This new trend in the women's movement was a product of changing social, economic and political climate in the country and a changing perception of women's oppression. AIWC and the majority of Mahila Mandals explain women's secondary status as the result of social customs, aberrations in religious practices and increasing materialist and acquisitive attitude of a consumerist society. So, the whole problem lies in the construction of gender relation in society.

Legislation in a number of areas has become increasingly gender-sensitive. The (Parental of Misuses) Bill, 1991 was passed by the Parliament during the Monsoon Session in 1994.<sup>23</sup> Such as Act, which permits parental diagnostic techniques on women only in specified conditions and in approved institution in the kind of action that needs to support. It is equally important to bring about a change in mind-sets so that society fully recognizes the social and economic contribution of women. The underlying socio-cultural biases against girls need to be addressed, and a nationwide celebration of femaleness ought to be promoted: one that recognizes and explicitly appreciates the intrinsic importance of women and girls at ages and throughout society. Greater understanding, better information and stronger advocacy can help significantly: starting with a common understanding of the rights of women and men alike, knowledge of the biology of gender, and more specifically, the role of determining both the gender of the offspring as well as their survival.

Empowerment is both individual and collective. Women in the informal economy are socially and economically weak and vulnerable, and it is only by the process of coming together that they can get empowered. Attapady is a tribal village in Kerala where high incidents of alcoholic and drug abused prevailed, leaving women in destitute. Anything they earned was spent on drugs and alcohol. Thaikulam a women's organization decided that they would either counsel or beat up the men who drink. They were the victims of violence but now they were targeting the same violence against men. The strength of their unity worked magic the total village was without liquor and no incidence of alcoholism related violence occurred again. It unleashed the strength and spirit of the India women and now they are able to control and manage their life to a large extent and take independent decisions covering all aspects of their lives.

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<sup>23</sup> D. D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, Wadhwa and Company, Nagpur, 1999, pp. 31-49.

This changing social and political situation of India offers many serious challenges and opportunities. The most crucial among them are the challenges of poverty, exploitation and oppression experienced by the majority of Indian women. The changing times in today's world have encouraged many women to seek her own identity, the value and worth of their lives, through the contributions they make to the family and society at large. Increased awareness about rights has motivated the submissive and sacrificing woman to become conscious of herself as a person with her own identity and personality.

### *The Case of Pakistan*

In 1944, at Aligarh University, Mohammad Ali Jinnah said, "No nation can rise to the heart of its glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the house as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable conditions in which our women have to live." Women's wings of the Muslim League then began to be set up in various cities.

The outlook and perception of the elite have been an important determinant of the status of women. The role of Islam in general remained a matter of debate. The violence against women, which may have been prevalent right from the beginning, came under public attention within and outside Pakistan after Gen. Zia's policy of *Islamization*. In this stage, the status of women under Islam was being discussed in the context of Islam itself.

Pakistan was created out of the British India in 1947 with the specific goal of becoming an Islamic republic, Pakistan provides a legal and social setting for women in which they are subject to Qur'anic law as it has been modified by legislation.<sup>24</sup> The All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) promoted the passage of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961 in an effort to restrict polygamy and to equalize the opportunity of women to divorce. The elite members of the APWA, however, could have little impact on the implementation of such modernist legislation. During the

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<sup>24</sup> Nora Fernandes, *Women's Action Forum and the Women's Movement in Pakistan Today*, in Nighat Said Khan, Rubina Saigol and Afiya Shehrabano Zia (eds.), 'A Celebration of Women: Essays and Abstracts from the Women's Studies Conference March 1994,' ASR Publications, Lahore, 1995, pp. 83-154.

1970s and 1980s the government of General Zia-ul-Huq attempted to bring the civil law into closer congruence with Islamic law.<sup>25</sup> In 1973 the Council of Islamic Ideology was formed to ensure that civil laws, including the MFLO, were interpreted in accordance with Islamic principles. and its rulings do not always favor women. It has eight to ten members, but only one must be a woman. Women's groups, especially the Women's Action Forum, and professional associations, particularly those of lawyers, have protested against efforts to reduce the scope of the MFLO (Alavi 1988).

In 1948, the first political organization of women came into being and had a distinct Marxist ideological base. The organization was under the umbrella of International Democratic Women's Federation. Their principal objectives were directed towards women working in factories, fisheries and railways. The leaderships were drawn from the middle class women of families connected with the Left politics of pre-partition days. They had demands based on the socialist lines- equal pay for equal work, hostels for women and transport facilities, expansion of employment, day-care facilities for children and mobilizing women for peace. Another organization formed in the early years, to deal specifically with women's rights was the United Front for Women's Rights. It was founded in 1955 by women political activists and dealt with reforms in legislative fields. But after promulgation of Family Laws Ordinance in 1961 and the restrictions on political activities in Ayub era, it became dormant.

Since independence, women's movement in Pakistan focused on getting social and political rights. Few urban educated middle class and upper middle class women were involved in both spheres. Women like Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Shiasta Ikramullah fought a legislative battle. They fought to get the Muslim personal law of *Shariat*, passed against fierce opposition in 1948 and became effective in 1951. This law recognized their right to inherit property, including agricultural property. IN different legislative committees, these women had to fight the *ulema*, who on occasion, even refused to sit with them. They demanded 10% quota of women's seats in the legislature a though only 3% was granted. Begum Shahnawaz presented a charter of demands for equality of status and opportunities for women.

In 1955 APWA launched a campaign against Mohammad Ali Bogra's second marriage. This was the occasion when the United Front was formed. The pressure from

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-31

women forced the government to form a commission on Reforms in family laws headed by Justice Rashid. In 1956, the commission presented its report but Maulana Ehtesham-ul-Haq gave his dissenting note and the report was shelved under pressure. In the 1956 constitution however, the principle of female suffrage was accepted. Women were to be elected on their reserved seats on the basis of special territorial constituencies, thus giving women the double vote.

Under the modernist dictatorship of Ayub Khan, the Rashid Commission Report became the Family Laws ordinance of 1961. Its main aim was to discourage polygamy and regulate divorce by prescribing procedures for both. The ordinance which exist as the only reform law for women, invited the wrath of the *ulemas*. They felt that thus moderate piece of legislation meant a reduction of power for them especially in the family. Following the attack on the ordnance women launched a movement in its support. Nasim Jehan led a march and burned an effigy of Maulana Abbas Ali Khan. Despite Ayub's liberal stance the basic attitude towards women did not change. The Assembly was indirectly elected and the six women were token representatives. A few women were taken into ministries. When Fatima Jinnah decided to contest against Ayub Khan the right wing parties supported her candidature. But Ayub Khan did manage to get some *ulemas* to issue a fatwa against her candidature. During Ayub's period, the women's organizations that came into existence were Behbood Association, which was totally welfare-oriented and the Saroptomist Club established in 1967. Its objectives were the advancement of status and role of women in economic and social uplift educational programmes, cultural activites and enhacing job opportunities. It was under General Zia that things changed. The regime's steps to Islamize the society resulted in setting up of *Nizam-Mustafa* which spelled doom for women. With the imposition of martial law, Gen. Zia suspended all fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution of 1973, including the right to be free of discrimination on the basis of sex.

Women have the right to vote, belong to political parties, and run for office. Benazir Bhutto (b. 1953), who first became prime minister in 1988 and was ousted in August 1990 on charges of mismanagement and corruption, is the most famous woman in Pakistani politics. The elder daughter and first child of a former prime minister who founded the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), her participation is similar to that of women in India and Bangladesh who enter politics through relationships with prominent males (Bhutto 1988). Bhutto reflects the ambiguous position of even elite women and the imperatives of political power in contemporary Pakistan (Zakaria 1990). Educated at



Harvard and Oxford, she assented to an arranged marriage in 1988, fulfilled her role as a mother, producing two sons and a daughter, and wears a *duppata* over her head whenever she appears in public. Her personal charisma and skill as an orator (first developed as president of the Oxford Union) enabled her to regain power as prime minister in October 1993 despite the weak organizational base of the PPP.<sup>26</sup> However, she once again was ousted in November 1996 on charges of misadministration and corruption, and her party suffered an overwhelming defeat in elections in February 1997.

In terms of human capacity, Indian and Pakistani women are, in no way inferior to women in the rest of the world. The rise of Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto as *premiers* tells the truth about their genuine class in comparison with other countries' women. To mention few among the galaxy of women who have brought laurels to India- Indira Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Kiran Bedi, Kalpana Chawala, Arundhati Roy ... and the list goes on.<sup>27</sup> However, the culturally bias attitude towards women that exist in both the societies stop them coming out from the limitations put upon them.

### **Changing aspects of Women Empowerment and Culture**

This decade has started with the hope that women would attain further empowerment in continuation of the process initiated few years back at the grass root level by adequate representation in the apex legislatures.<sup>28</sup> In the last one-decade, we have seen some revolutionary changes in the way people think, working, doing business and education. For one, there is an unmistakable trend towards globalization with its opportunities and challenges. Second, technologies are changing at a breakneck pace and training in skills is often falling short of the speed of this change. Not just changes, technologies are often converging and merging into single unit with multiple purposes. Third, the right attitude for every job and a professional approach in every aspect we plan and execute are the other things, which are of great significance today. In an age of intense competition, globalization and growing changes, we cannot avoid going global. Therefore, techno-savvy and practicing high standards of managerial professionalism and precision become a necessity in our work. In this environment the question of

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<sup>26</sup> Veena Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 243

<sup>27</sup> These women represent in different fields and they also present that women in India are also not less in comparing with others.

<sup>28</sup> V.Mohini Giri, *Empowerment of Women: An Overview*, n.a., New Delhi, July-September 2003, p. 33

gender difference has narrowed down and concept of professional compatibility and working efficiency have given more importance than general attitude of biological strength. No doubt there are still social constraints that go against the basic interest of full empowerment of women. However, the changes in the better side are also undeniable.

Empowerment is the process by which the disemboweled, or powerless, people can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their lives. More importantly, empowerment means the way we think of ourselves – to see us not as victims of circumstances but as architects of our destinies.<sup>29</sup> Empowerment results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions, and in the relationships. Perhaps the most important effect of empowerment is that the person says; now I have no fear.

Actually, the situation of women has changed completely in the last 20 years. At the beginning of the 1970s women were a blind spot in both development aid and the debate on it.<sup>30</sup> The promotion of women is now established in all state institution and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Gender training is to sensitize development workers to take a gender specific approach in analyzing development process, carrying out statistical surveys and planning and evaluating activities.

Those women in the 1970s who criticized development policy and its actors for being one-eyed must not see themselves as line-prompters and idea-providers. All the terms they used have been adopted in official usage. The image of the women has changed from being a Cinderella-like, the door soul, the victim, to a dynamic reliable actor with apparently inexhaustible reserves of energy and creativity to bring to bear in a development process that has got stuck. Nancy Birdsall, vice president of the Inter American Development Bank, represents today precisely the critical stance of the 1970s. She has the concept of integrating women in development is a totally skewed approach because “women are essential actress in the encounters of their countries.” In the Cairo debate and the World Bank’s latest policy programme, the concept of empowerment has replaced the old “integration in development” approach in the promotion of women. And the women’s approach (women in Development) is currently being pushed aside by the gender approach (Gender and Development). This calls for the inclusion of men, taking a close look at the gender relationship and changing, it in

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<sup>29</sup> Sunita Padhe, *Women’s Subordination (Its Origin)*, Kanak Publication, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 1-23.

<sup>30</sup> Padmini Swaminathan, *State Policies and the Subordination of Women*, in Susheela Kaushik (ed.), op. cit., pp. 45-55.

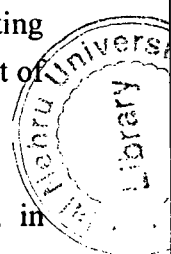
the long run.

All this is undoubtedly progress that illuminated the blind spot. So, is that enough to please women critics of the male dominated development aid scene and female lobbyists for the promotion of women? Have they achieved what they wanted? That is, a policy on women that on the one hand takes up their practical, everyday needs, but on the other works strategically towards eliminating the hierarchy between the genders by structural changes?

The fact is that one must differentiate between the government multilateral institutions and NGOs in what they are saying and what they are doing. There have been no changes in the World Bank's goal of promoting women. It's still about increasing the productivity of women. The bank defines it in multi-functional terms. Improving the productivity of women contributes to growth, efficiency and alleviating poverty. It adds that this is an important part of development strategy, and also no act of social justice.

The Inter-America Development Bank puts it ever more unmistakably, in developmental planning the most successful programme is the decisive role of women in reducing poverty. And the means-to-an-end relationship becomes clear when it comes to making women's work easier. This should enable them to make an even greater social and economic contribution. And that should include earning an income, providing a social safety net and working more efficiently in farming in order to cushion the impacts of structural adjustment programmes on the poor. Taking care of family health, practicing both control and, family, using their female sense for accountability to accelerate democratization. Women appear to be bears of hopes in a sea of misery economic are not asked for. Economic Cooperation and Development poster, the message is a caption to a picture of an African women working with a baby on her back. Whether it's an intended or not this strengthens the social trend to feminist responsibility. A series of human rights treaties and international conferences has provided the legal and international basis for ending gender discrimination and promoting equal rights for women. These include the International Women's Bill of Rights, formally titled the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 and ratified by 168 countries<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Fatima Hussain, op.cit., p.35.



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## Chapter2

### CULTURAL CONSERVATISM OR GENDER CONSERVATISM:

In India and Pakistan, religious taboos, customs and traditions play a decisive role in women's life. More important than this is the role of women in giving and cultural tone to the society from behind the curtain. They influenced royal taste and patronage to artists, singer etc. Women are still the victims of this orthodox culture. The status of women in South Asia (especially non-tribal communities) is very far from equality. Marriage, property, custody of children, restrictions based on taboos, customs and traditions are the socio-religious factors that completely imprisoned the prospect of women in South Asia to come up in the society and bring gender equality. These social practices are foreign to other part of the world. So, the problem attracts considerable attention.

The question regarding the source or origin of gender inequality in India and Pakistan is to be seen from the traditional angle. The religious rituals, customary social practices, traditional beliefs and the methods of child treatment are very important and has better weight in understanding the problem of gender bias social culture. Throughout the history of India, we have seen that women have been the source of inspiration and at the same time they also become victims of lust in the society. So, on that basis, we can arise our question how women have dumped in the society? What made them to be dumped? And who are involved? In order to answer these questions we must go with clear knowledge of how women were in the history of these societies, the changes in their lives. This chapter deal with these answers.

The primary concern is to identify the area of and the intensity of conservativeness of the social behaviour and its turn towards gender relation. Its is important to ask how a conservative outlook of a society depicts or perceive about women. Gender relation of a society depends much on how they are treated in the history and the space provided by the society with change and continuity. It is a fact that there is no culture in the world which treat man and woman alike from top to bottom. Even in matrilineal societies, like the *Khasi*, in India (Meghalaya) women are not fully above the male domination, they do suffer the same pain.

Beside understanding the historical significance and the role of women in the society, it is also very important to know women in other part of the world. We can estimate the areas of backwardness or shortcomings and misgivings only when we are aware of the problem and condition of women in other part of the world. Whatsoever, now we are dealing with the problem of how this gender bias attitude rooted in the society come into existence.

### **A Brief General Account on Women in the Third World**

In general histories of the Third World, political access is not normally discussed with gender as a factor of analysis, although frequently class, race, ethnicity, and other factors are considered. And being of a particular class, race, or ethnicity could influence women's power and status as much as gender. Still, the type and degree of women's political participation both as individuals and as a group have been underreported, and the present has frequently been mistaken for the past.

One of the most obvious ways women exercised direct power was by ruling. In the ancient African kingdom of *Kush*, women as summed power in their own right as well as sometimes co-ruling with their sons. There were women who ruled in early Austronesian societies from Polynesia to Madagascar, including the Philippines and Indonesia. In India, several Hindu and Muslim women ruled small kingdoms during the late eighteenth century. In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Burma and the Malay Peninsula was ruled by women. In twentieth-century *Guditwasa*, powerful queen of the Agao ruled Abyssinian.

Most women who ruled were elite by birth, but then so were ruling men. However, Queen Njinga certainly achieved rather than inherited her power, moving from the position of palace slave to that of a reigning monarch. Although the existence of women rulers indicates that women were not universally absent from the highest seats of power, having a woman ruler did not necessarily reflect the status of other women or empower them, any more than it does today<sup>32</sup>.

Women also exercised direct power within arenas viewed as the female

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara N. Ramusack and Sharon Sievers, *Women in Asia: Restoring Women To History*, Indiana University Press, n. a., 1988, p. 38.

province; these varied based upon material culture. In Africa female networks seem to have arisen from the gender division of labor, and over many centuries women exercised considerable power and autonomy within society as a whole through all-female organizations. Women exercised considerable power within the royal harem in both Turkey and Iran. Women exercised power as members of collectives of their own sex organized for particular purposes. Practices similar to the Nigerian institution of *sitting on a man* are found in various African societies. This phrase describes organized political activities of women who gathered as a group to protest policies or protect another woman by confronting a man and ridiculing him or making demands, sometimes even destroying his property as a punishment for some act against a woman or women as a whole. Women directed this practice against recalcitrant husbands and colonial officials alike. There is also evidence of the existence of this kind of activity in early twentieth century.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous example of women's indirect and influential power is the existence of the queen mother, normally the progenitor of a male ruler although sometimes a woman appointed as his "mother." These women had power over women and men. Their power resulted not only from their access to the ruler, serving as his "ear," so to speak, but also because they often commanded formidable financial and personnel resources and/or had specific responsibilities over the governed. Queen mothers existed in ancient Kush, India, the Ottoman Empire, and West, East, and Northeast Africa, to name a few places. Some queen mothers, such as Shah Turkan of thirteenth-century Delhi, could be very instrumental in installing their sons on the throne, and consequently exercised considerable state power. Others, like Mihrisah, mother of the Ottoman ruler Selim II, who ruled in the early nineteenth century, exercised considerable power through largesse; she built a mosque and a medical school. Yaa Kyaa, mother of the West African Asante ruler Osei Yaw, also exercised considerable state power, even signing a peace treaty between the Asante and the British in the 1830s, and Yaa Asantewa led a large revolt against British rule. The queen mother, however, usually owed her power to her relationship to a male ruler and not to her relationship to other women. Even though she might be regarded as *queen of the women*, she did not necessarily represent women's interests as a whole. Still, these women were often at the center of power, and many displayed formidable political acumen.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-43

We also cannot discount the power and influence of women who were the wives, sisters, daughters, and consorts of powerful men. Precisely because of the intimate context in which such situations occurred, they are admittedly hard to document, but evidence exists. Women such as Ines Suarez, who accompanied Captain Pedro de Valdivia as his lover in his campaign to conquer Chile, played an important role as a spy and confidante and eventually took part in the conquest. Wives of emperors in the Byzantine empire wielded considerable political influence. Nineteenth-century Confucian reformers in China were influenced by increased contact with literate women at court and in elite families. The nineteenth-century Islamic reform movement led by Uthman dan Fodio in West Africa was certainly influenced in its ideas on greater education for women by the women in Fodio's own family, which produced five generations of women intellectuals who left bodies of written work in Fula, Arabic, and Hausa. In the West African kingdom of Dahomey, by the eighteenth century at least, no man could become king without the support of the powerful palace women. Royal women in nineteenth-century Iran also exercised considerable power and independence, even from inside the harem. There are many other examples, which suggest to us that women's influential roles in politics were consequential.

Women's military participation as individuals and as organized corps of women fighters was also widespread. In many places women accompanied male troops, such as in Aksum and early Ethiopian kingdoms, in early Arabia, in Latin America, and elsewhere. But women were also actual combatants. The African Queen Amina of Zaria led troops into battle, as did the renowned Nguni warrior Nyamazana, of early nineteenth-century southern Africa, and Indian women in Delhi and Bhopal in the second half of the eighteenth century. One woman, Nanny, is still revered as a fighter and ruler of one of the most famous maroon communities, Nanny Town. Actual corps of trained women soldiers also existed, such as those in Java and in the West African kingdom of Dahomey, where they formed the king's bodyguard and were an elite unit of "shock troops." In eighteenth-century Egypt, women went into battle against Mamluks and the French. In the nineteenth century women fought in Japan, in the T'ai p'ing Rebellion in China, and in the Mexican Revolution. In early twentieth-century China, corps of women fought as the "Women's Suicide Brigade" and the "Women's National Army." Twentieth-century anti-colonial and liberation struggles are replete with examples of women as combatants, for example, in the 1950s "Mau Mau" rebellion in Kenya, the Frelimo liberation army in Mozambique, and the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.

In addition to serving in military roles, women organized in other capacities with men and in women's groups against colonial policies that they viewed as inimical to their interests. In India at the turn of the twentieth century, women were active in the *swadeshi*<sup>34</sup> movement, which sought to encourage the use of indigenously made products as opposed to European imports. In the 1930s Indian women participated in anti-colonial protest marches in Bombay and elsewhere. In 1929 the "Women's War" of the Igloo and Ibibio of eastern Nigeria was a massive uprising of women against the threat of female taxation by the colonial state. In 1945 the market women in Lagos, Nigeria were very instrumental in a general strike against economic and political policies of the British. Women in Egypt, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire worked with men in organizations promoting independence from European imperialism by participating in street demonstrations, public speaking, and writing. In the Algerian War of Independence against the French (1954-62), women were couriers of weapons, money, and messages, as well as actual combatants.

Women's participation in general strikes, major protest marches, economic boycotts, and armed rebellion was prevalent everywhere there was an anti-colonial struggle. As with any major societal upheaval resulting in challenges to existing authority, colonialism both created opportunities for and oppressed women. In the final analysis, however, the vast majority of women have opted to work for the independence of their societies and to pursue the issue of gender equality in the context of an independent and autonomous state<sup>35</sup>.

Despite all these, the fact was that improving women's status has often been a central point of anti-colonial ideology; women have usually not become the political and economic equals of men in newly evolving independent societies. In fact, the development of nationalist movements, at least in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has often operated to subordinate women. In nineteenth-century Japan the growth of nationalism and patriotism tended to subjugate women, requiring that they be good wives and mothers as their first "patriotic" duty. Although initially instituting reforms that served to empower women, within a few years the Kuomintang nationalist movement in early twentieth-century China began to repress a developing feminist

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<sup>34</sup> Movement against foreign rulers.

<sup>35</sup> Bipin Chandra, Amal Tripathi and Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 102-120.



movement that had supported its rise to power. The 1922 Egyptian constitution denied women the right to vote and barred them from the opening of Parliament, despite the active role they had played in the nationalist movement. After the success of the Algerian Revolution, women's roles in the war were viewed as validation of their "traditional" roles of wife and mother. After gaining independence, the Indonesian nationalist movement encouraged women to go back into the home to provide "social stability." In Nigeria, although the nationalist movements of the mid-twentieth century had courted women and counted them as strong supporters in the independence struggle, women remained generally excluded from political power after independence and especially under military rule. In many disparate places and cultures, nationalism left women unrewarded after independence was achieved.

Frelimo in Mozambique criticized both the traditional initiation rites that included notions of female subordination as well as the colonial exploitation of women's labour. This kind of struggle was termed "fighting to colonialisms" comparable liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau. In Cuba the government also sought, to address the issue of women's equality in the post-independence period in a written family code that explicitly delineates women's equal status compared to that of men. The revolutionary Nicaraguan government of the 1980s attempted to officially stipulate women as the equals of men. The positive difference in these countries, however, seems as related to women's continued organization as women (such as the Organization of Mozambican Women and the Cuban Federation of Women) as to state-supported revolutionary ideology.

### **The Age old Customary Practices in India and Pakistan**

It has been cited time and again that the old traditional social practices in India and Pakistan are the main source of women's submission under the domination of male folk and the society at large. These are the backdrops of why women are hiding their own selves against themselves. Various arguments have put up in academic and other circles against these traditions and recommend changes and suggested various alternatives towards removing the countering practices. However, there are constraints in undoing the centuries old practices. The plain demand of political participation, or reservation, etc. etc. won't serve the real purpose of emancipating and empowering women from the clutches of male domination and total submissiveness in the society.

The ignorant character of the society is being created by the society, collectively by both women and men. Women are the first who talk bad about themselves. It is one of the soft attitude or nature of the womenfolk that gives clear evidence that they are not at all confident on their own capacity. The physical submissiveness leads to morale submissive of the womenfolk.

There are numerous customary practices attached to a woman's life since ages. They are still practice in their new forms in India and Pakistan. Almost all these practices are responsible in weakening the social status of women in those days and today as well. It appears to be existent in every part of the world. But the changes of circumstances along with time and environment eroded those practices pose against humanity. And it went along with the realization of human value, the emergence of the concept of individualism, and the realization of the rational value of individuals etc. However, it is also true that old social behaviour cannot be wiped out completely and for all. It continues to exist in one way or the other. In the light of this argument let us study the historical background, beliefs and the lineages of few customary practices, attached to woman's life, followed in India and partly in Pakistan as it is very necessary in order to give comparative view when we attempt to bring condition of women in other part of the world.

### ***The Tradition of Child Marriage***

Even in this age we have increasing evidence of the practice of child marriage, the physical seclusion of women. The age of women at marriage during the early Vedic period seems to have hovered around sixteen, but by the Gupta period there appeared to be a growing preference for younger brides, as indicated in the Laws of Manu. Early marriages were designed to protect the family honour and to maintain caste divisions that were deemed dependent on the chastity of women. Although such marriages were not consummated until puberty, the residence of young brides in their in-laws' home possibly meant that it was easier to engender loyalty to the patriarchal extended family unit among girls of six or seven than among mature women of sixteen. Early marriages might also have been an unconscious response to high rates of maternal mortality and low median ages<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara N. Rasmusack and Sharon Sievers, *Women in Asia: Restoring Women to History*. Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 29.

The Laws of *Manu* acknowledge eight forms of marriage as outlined in the *Arthashastra*<sup>37</sup>, but they discount as base the last four, which involved some individual initiative (P. Mukherjee 1973). *Kanyadan*, or the gift of a virgin daughter in marriage, emerges as threat through which a man gains the greatest spiritual merit. This transaction, which occurs between two males, the father and the groom, also ensures the immortality of the groom's line by providing heirs and enables the young girl to achieve assiduousness as a mother. Once the marriage of daughters becomes a spiritual necessity, fathers make many concessions in order to effect such transactions. Women become objects to be given, and marriage is their only acceptable status. *Kanyadan* also establishes a unidirectional flow of gifts from the bride's family to the groom's family, which reflects the lower status of the giver to the receiver (Fruzzetti 1982; Van der Veen 1972). These gifts come to be crudely labeled dowry. In her work in progress on the concept of dowry, Veena Oldenburg claims that these gifts are also evidence of the love of parents for daughters and their desire to care for them throughout their lives. Others emphasize that dowry might be related to the inability of women to inherit property, the need for men to gift their daughters to a restricted pool of men, and increasing hypergamy (Bhattacharji 1991).

### *The Practice of Sati*

*Sati* is a term of multiple meanings and the focus of much debate. It may refer to a virtuous woman so dedicated to her husband that she burns to death on his funeral pyre; it may refer to the act of self-immolation itself; or *Sati* may be a goddess<sup>38</sup>. The first recorded instance of *sati* as the act of self-immolation is not certain, but Elizabeth Leigh Stutchbury (1982) notes that Greek chronicles relate that in 316 B.C.E. the wife of Meteus, an Indian general who died fighting Antigonos, burned herself and that this custom prevailed among the "Kathia" tribe of Punjab. The origin of *sati* as a social custom has been ascribed both to the Aryans and to later tribes migrating from Central Asia into South Asia. *Sati* is first mentioned as a goddess. She is the initial wife of Lord Siva and commits self-immolation because of an insult to her God-Husband. Many scholars argue that she does not serve as the inspiration for the ritual suicide of a widow, since she died before her husband. The practice of *sati* is most dramatically

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<sup>37</sup> The old written text of India for the rulers and administration of the kingdom.

<sup>38</sup> Straton, Hawley (ed). *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, OUP, New York, 1994, p. 60.

associated with higher-caste Rajputs, especially *kshatriyas*, and *Brahman* groups in Bengal, but it was also known in other areas, including south India. Vociferous debate over the religious basis for this practice arose first in the early nineteenth century, when the British moved to outlaw the custom, and more recently after an alleged *sati* occurred at Deorala near Jaipur, Rajasthan, in September 1987.<sup>39</sup> Orthodox supporters of the custom continue to cite passages from the *dharmasastra* that enjoin a wife to be *sati*, or pure, and claim that death unequivocally ensures purity and prevents a woman from becoming an inauspicious widow. Opponents of the practice rely on the same passage and argue that to be *sati*, or chaste, does not require a widow to commit suicide.

The tradition gradually developed that through *sati* a widow would earn thirty-five million years of bliss for her deceased husband and for herself and would bring assiduousness for three to seven generations for her marital and sometimes even her natal family. A *sati* stone erected on the site of a widow's immolation was a perpetual reminder of the woman's sacrifice and a popular place of pilgrimage.

There is little evidence about the function of *sati* from the widow's viewpoint or that of orthodox Hindus who promoted the practice. Many of the most-quoted accounts of *sati* have come from foreign observers, beginning with Ibn Battuta in the thirteenth century, through the French physician Francois Bernier in the seventeenth century, to numerous British officials and travelers in the nineteenth century. Their accounts have portrayed instances of both voluntary and involuntary *sati* and have been the filter for women's voices. Scholars have tended to relate *sati* to the increasingly low status of women in general and widows in particular and to the desire of high castes to maintain their ritual purity. As widows were increasingly held responsible for their husbands' death, *sati* became a form of personal expiation. For the woman it also presented an escape from the harsh life prescribed for a widow, in which she was to wear white *saris* and no jewelry, eat only one meal daily, and avoid all celebratory occasions, especially weddings, since she was considered inauspicious. Some commentators have labeled such an existence "cold *sati*." However, the research of Anand Yang has revealed the use of *sati* by lower-caste/class women in Bihar long after the death of their husbands as a honourable means of suicide in desperate economic situations. *Sati* also brought

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<sup>39</sup> U. Kalpagam, 'Globalization, Politics and Women,' *Man and Development*, Vol. 25, no. 1, 2003 March, pp.1-20.

spiritual and social prestige to a woman's family and in-laws as well as economic relief, since they did not have to provide for the widow who could no longer remarry.

### *Woman and Religion*

Although the prescriptive literature of the Gupta period urged submissiveness, chastity, and even ritual suicide for women, the religious literature was more ambivalent about women. The *Devi-Mahatmya*, a Sanskrit text dating from the fifth or sixth century C.E. that is part of the *Markandevya purana*, codified the non-Aryan, non-Vedic tradition of seeing the ultimate principle of the universe as feminine.<sup>40</sup> This cult of envisioning the divine as feminine is known as Saktism in India. It is associated with the tribal groups and possibly the Indus Valley and Dravidian cultures that existed in India. Prior to the coming of the Aryans and that survived on the geographical fringes of the Aryan conquests. The emergence of the *Devi-Mahatmya* reflects the continuing dynamic interaction between Aryan and non-Aryan traditions. Stated in the simplest terms, these female personifications of the divine are usually portrayed in three major incarnations. Most basic is the Mother Goddess, known simply as *Devi*, who protects and nurtures her devotees. The second form is *Durga*, a goddess created by male gods and given all their weapons in order to destroy *Mahisa*, the buffalo demon, whom the gods in their separate existences cannot contain. *Durga*, whose historical origin appears to be non-Aryan, first appears as unmarried around the fourth century C.E. and was frequently associated with mountains that fringed Aryan society. Although her aggressive and bloody behavior violate prescriptive Hindu norms for the ideal woman, *Durga* eventually is married to *Siva* both in her form as *Durga* (where she becomes the focus of *Durga' Puja*, a major autumn festival in Bengal) and as *Parvati*, a goddess who exists to bring the ascetic *Siva* into marriage and settled society (Kinsley 1986; O'Flaherty 1982). The most horrific and potent form of the female goddess is *Kali*, the black goddess of Time and Destruction, who is created to help *Durga* in her battle with *Mahisa*. *Kali* is represented initially as autonomous but is eventually viewed as a consort of *Siva*, the powerful god of the Hindu trinity who destroys the world when its inhabitants can no longer observe their caste duty or *dharma*. Wearing a necklace of

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<sup>40</sup> Indra, *Status of Women in Ancient India: A Vivid Graphic Survey of Women's Position, Social Religious Political and Legal in Ancient India* (Second Edition), Motilal Banarasidass, Banaras, 1955, pp. 1-23.

skulls as symbolic of her destructive power, Kali has a long tongue that licks up the blood of a demon *that* creates new beings from drops of his blood. She embodies the disorderliness of life as well as the existence of death.

These images of female goddesses have been analyzed as evidence of the male fear of female potency, as the embodiment of ambiguous attitudes toward women and female power in a society that *was* becoming increasingly sex-segregated, and as symbols of female empowerment. For the historian they reflect the re-emergence of female goddesses from pre-Aryan cultures and the continuing interaction among the multiple cultures eventually labeled "Hinduism" by outside observer. The divine as female also re-emerged in a new form of Buddhism.

### ***The Case in the North Eastern India***

In northeastern India during the *Pala* period, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, *Tantric Buddhism* evolved in reaction to institutionalized Buddhism. Many scholars of *Tantric Buddhism* have characterized *women* as ancillary in male yogic practices leading to enlightenment. But Miranda Shaw claims that women were equal to men as divinities, teachers, and devotees. There were *women* Tantric teachers: for example, Bhiksuni Lakshmi of Kashmir (ca. tenth to eleventh centuries C.E.), who developed a widely practiced fasting ritual to achieve purification and salvation, and women *who* organized ritual communal feasts which included sacramental food and drink, spiritual instruction, and music and dancing as means to a higher understanding of the ultimate reality. Shaw argues that men and *women* are complementary and equal partners in the esoteric practice of *Tantric sexual union* through which both *women* and men seek *passionate enlightenment* by surrendering to egoless freedom. Shaw's creative scholarship, combining textual analysis and anthropological fieldwork with extended discipleship with a *Tantric guru* (teacher), reveals the possibilities of feminist reinterpretation of religious traditions. By discarding Western categories of body and soul. Sublimation and passion, her analysis attempts to understand words, actions, and deities within the more fluid Conceptual diagrams of the religious tradition being studied.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to the works cited in this section, see O'Flaherty 1980, 1994, or 1999.

A woman, according to the most authorities, was always a minor at law. As a girl she was under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband, as widow, of her sons. Even under the liberal rules of Buddhism a nun, however advanced in the faith, was always subordinate to the youngest novice among the brethren. Early law-books assess a woman's wergild as equivalent to that of a *Sudra*, whatever her class<sup>42</sup>

Most schools of law allowed a woman some personal property (*stridhana*) in the form of jewellery and clothing. The *Arthashastra* allowed her also to own money up to 2,000 silver panas, any sum above this being held by her husband in trust on her behalf. The husband had certain rights over his wife's property; he might sell it in dire emergency, and he might restrain her from giving it away wantonly, but for practical purposes it was her own, and when she died it passed not to her husband or to her sons, but to her daughters. Thus the property rights of women, limited though they were, were greater than in many other early civilizations. In fact women sometimes possessed more than was usually allowed to them by the rulers of *stridhana*. Jaina tradition mentions a potter-woman of the town of Sravasti who owned a pottery with one hundred potter's wheels. Her status is nowhere mentioned, and it may be that she was thought of as a widow to inherit when there were no sons<sup>43</sup>.

### ***The Case of Muslim Women***

In Muslim times the Hindus of Northern India adopted the system of *purda*, which, from puberty to old age, carefully screened women from the sight of all men but their husbands and close relatives. Though such a system did not exist in ancient India the freedom accorded to married women has been often exaggerated by authorities anxious to show that the more objectionable aspects of later Hindu custom had no place in India's ancient great days of Hindus. It was certainly not so strictly secluded as in later Muslim communities, however, for early Arab travelers remarked that queens were often to be seen in Hindu courts without veils, and many other references show that, though screened from the general public and carefully watched, the royal ladies were not completely inaccessible, as in the Muslim system.

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<sup>42</sup> A.L. Basham, *The wonder that Was India*, Rupa Publications and Co., Allahabad, 1954, p. 177

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.178

## Continuity with Change

Indian society in the nineteenth century was caught in a vicious web created by religious superstitions and social obscurantism. Hinduism, as Max Weber observed, had 'become a compound of magic, animism and superstition' and abominable rites like animal sacrifice and physical torture had replaced the worship of God. The priests exercised an overwhelming and, indeed, unhealthy influence on the minds of the people. Idolatry and polytheism helped to reinforce their position. As suggested by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, their monopoly of scriptural knowledge and of ritual interpretation imparted a deceptive character to all religious systems. The faithful lived in submission, not only to God, the powerful and unseen, but also even to the whims, fancies and wishes of the priests to satisfy their carnal pleasures<sup>44</sup>.

Girls are considered as *Paraya Dhan*.<sup>45</sup> This happened as a result of the misinterpretation by the socio-religious institution. Education and awareness of girls about their rights and roles is important and gender sensitization should be for both girls and boys. Patriarchal thinking must be addressed aggressively.

Mira Siva argued *dahej* (dowry) is falsely considered a part of culture and seen as bad Indian tradition and is attached to social status of the 'party'. It is actually greed. Tradition never promoted dowry harassment<sup>46</sup>.

In this kind of male-dominant societies, women's activities, values, and interactions often form a "muted" subculture: their worldview is non-dominant and does not generally claim to represent that of the entire society of men and women. This subculture is reinforced by a strong gender division of labour that results in women and men spending most of their time in same-sex groupings and, occasionally, is augmented by ideological formulations or social rules (e.g., notions of pollution, or *purdah*).

Women's networks and women's subculture are often derive from the marginalization of women from the centers of power, have been controversial in the scholarship. Even in extreme forms (perhaps more so there), the separating of women

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<sup>44</sup> Bipan Chandra and Others, *India's Struggle For Independence 1857-1947*, Penguin books, 1988, p.83

<sup>45</sup> Some one else's asset or property.

<sup>46</sup> Mira Shiva, *Reflecting on Women's Empowerment Issues in Relation to Gender Equity*, New Delhi, July-September 2003. p. 55. An interview of Dr. Mira Siva with Dr. Archana Sinha from Women's Unit, Department of Research of Indian Social Institute.



can provide a source of psychological support and connectedness and protection. In assessing the actions of women among themselves, the important issues of victimization and agency are played out and we must ask certain questions: On whose initiative are the women grouped? How do women respond to this grouping? How does the clustering of women, apart from men, empower and/or limit women? Is this a condition that encourages women's oppression of other women (since there are now distinctions of power drawn between women) as much as it encourages female solidarity?

The physical separation of women contributed to a flowering of artistic, oral and written culture from the female subculture. The world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji*, is one example of the fine literary work of Japanese women writers in the eleventh century. Unlike men, who were restricted by gender norms to writing rather arid, but higher-status, these women composed prose or poetry in the language of indigenous expression of sentiment. Even where excluded from education and certain cultural outlets, women's networks produced a fine and rich tradition of oral expression.<sup>47</sup>

At times, women demanded the separate space or take advantage of it as a refuge from oppressive features of their society. For example, the sisterhoods of silk workers in southern China, who pledged to resist marriage, provided an alternative to the patriarchal family. Buddhism allowed women to pursue the monastic life, albeit as less than equals to male monks. Still, Indian Buddhist nuns taught religion to other women and composed religious poetry. (Jainism accepted nuns as the equals of monks.) Women, who joined Buddhist nunneries criticized for ignoring female responsibilities of motherhood, although these nunneries, we might suspect, provided a space. And not all who resided in a convent lived by vows of poverty and chastity.

Whatever its source or structural manifestation, this social space and the resulting female-controlled institutions offered women rich opportunities. Among the most important of these opportunities was the potential for female solidarity. In addition to encouraging female solidarity, the separation of women and men had economic consequences at times. Islamic seclusion provided the impetus for the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-78

development of occupations serving the women of the harem or *zenana*, such as midwives, educators, entertainers, musicians, or cosmologists; for reasons of honour and modesty, these occupations were filled by women. The same rationale prompted the expansion of professions open to women: medicine, nursing, and teaching<sup>48</sup>.

### **Modern Equipment Promoting old Gender Preference**

A significant number of girls are not alive often because they have not been allowed to live, either through selective abortion following sex-determination in pregnancy, or due to neglect just days or only hours after birth, because of inadequate attention following their delivery. Whereas earlier families gladly accepted a girl born to them, a traditionally strong son preferences combined with the mounting pressures of modern society to have a small a family has contributed to he phenomenon of femaleticide. Studies have shown that while parental sex determination may enable a couple to recognize the sex of heir unborn child.

Census-based estimates of child mortality in 1981 revealed that female mortality exceeded male mortality in 224 out of 402 districts of India. According to data available from the sample registration system in 1992, infant mortality rates among girl were higher than among boys for India as a whole, and in eight out of 17 India States. Even though, biologically speaking the probability of girl children surviving is greater than that of boys, in India, the situation is the opposite. This can be largely attributed to the method sex selection through electronic device. With the notable exception of Andhra Pradesh, Assam Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, in the remaining 11 of the more populations Indian States, and for the country as a whole, the age-specifics death rate among girls (below 4 years of age) was higher than among boys in 1991<sup>49</sup>.

Poverty is often regarded as major force leading families to despair over the birth of yet another girl child-with the implied costs of raising her, only to get her married off at an exorbitant expense in the feature- anti-female bias against girls. This is by no means limited to he poor. For instance, Punjab and Haryana two of the richest states in terms of per capita incomes, have among the lowest female to male ratio: 87.4

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.44

<sup>49</sup> Satya Pal Malik, 'Towards Polio Eradication in India,' *Yojana*, Vol. 46, No. no. , March 2002, p. 44-48

women to 100 men in Haryana and 88 women for every 100 men in Punjab. Also, a girl in a Punjab household has a 10 percent higher likelihood of dying before the age of five years than her brother. Even within these states, studies have shown that survival ratios between girl and boys become increasingly adverse with raising income.

This subcontinent is the least gender sensitive region in the world. The sex ratio is 105.7 men to every 100 women. On the other hand, a tribal society, almost invariably poor by all material standards, shows little anti-female bias, with roughly equal survival rates among boys and girls. Considerable research has also shown that very often, it is not the level of income or material well-being that makes families discriminate against the girl child; much of it has to do with cultural beliefs, social norms superstitions and mind-sets that combine to produce discriminatory behavior patterns.

In India and Pakistan, women had achieved far-reaching changes in the legal, political, educational and social status. Initiative towards improving the position of women had begun since Raja Ram Mohan Roy who started his social reform movement questioning the social orthodoxy long before the partition of India. The national movement for freedom treated women as 'equal political being,' sensitive about nationalist feelings and capable of struggle and sacrifice. And their participation offered the opportunity to resolve many doctrinal debates about the desirability of women's role in the public sphere. If women could defy the laws, go to jail like that of man, and then they could also aspire to take up whatever a man can do. They should have equal access to everything that men enjoy in the society. But the already rooted conservative patriarchy society did not leave any room for the women to come up to the equal platform along with the male folk. Those women once on the street in procession along with their male folk shouting for independence are now backed to the kitchen. There have been number of women in the national figure. But only the elite women were given a chance of coming up to their status. As time changes, quality of education enriched and awareness of human rights, people start talking about the poor participation of women in all the social sectors and the disadvantage of it.

The cultural outlook of societies towards gender needs to be answered in the process of empowering women. Along with the changing environment and in the process of modernization various social attitudes have eroded. However, the cultural psychology of the society remained. So, the study is an attempt to question the legitimacy of this strong cultural psychology that left by the patriarchy society of the

two countries<sup>50</sup>

### **Women in Indian Society**

No doubt, in India, the image of the women had changed from a mere recipient of justice in the nineteenth century, to an ardent supporter of nationalist men since the early twentieth women fought along with men for Indian independence. But the already rooted patriarchy society of India did not leave another chance for an equal gender outlook. Those women once on the street in procession along with their male folk shouting for independence went backed to the kitchen. They fought for the same cause 'independence,' and instantly they are ready to go under the same type hardship. Indian women's participation in overall social aspects is somewhat countable not in quantity but in terms of quality. There have been number of women in the national figure. But it is only the elite women in India who comes up to that level.

The condition and status of women in India varied greatly among communities. This is because of the age-old social constraint that India retains from her rich tradition for this modern age. For this reason the question of gender bias prevails in any discussion on social issues in the country. And there are lot more differences in various sections of societies on the question of attitude towards women. Indian society is the product of so many different sub-societies, all having their own culture, tradition, and way of thinking, looks, and so on. The Muslim community has a different outlook unlike of the Hindus, whereas; the Christians have a different outlook unlike of both the community. On top of that there are social hierarchies based on the age-old tradition. Women are not considered as important as men in any form of culture. It is true that we cannot clap only with one hand, but the already rooted patriarchy society of India did not leave another chance for an equal outlook. Traditionally, women have been discriminated in her access to productive resources. However, only man cannot bring overall development of the country, as women constitute half of the total population.

No matter how far Indian women have come out of the traditional place, they are far behind the male counterpart. Gender equality is still out of proportion. 5,000 brides are murdered or commit suicide in relation to dowry every year in India.<sup>51</sup> The participation of women in policy making, organized economic sector, and social status

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<sup>50</sup> J. Rappaport, 'Terms of Empowerment/exemplars of Prevention: Toward a Theory for Community Psychology,' *American Journal of community Psychology*, New York, 1987, p. 124

<sup>51</sup> *The Hindu Editorial*, February 17, 2004

are nowhere near equal to man. It is understandable that in such a big and heterogeneous country the guarantee of preferential treatment to each and every section in the country is not easy, and on top of that the question of gender equality assumes its height. However, we just can't avoid the question of gender equality as long as the overall development of the nation is concerned. Women in India are not only freedom fighters but also active participants in shaping national policies. They are still considered as lesser human beings, man make mockery of women as a sex machine or a reproductive machine

Ignoring women contribution in socio-religious, political and economic role in India, is the outcome of conservative cultural that India retains from her rich tradition. Women are regarded as *laxmi* in every household and at the same time they are kept under male domination. In fact, there are lot more differences in various sections of societies on the question of attitude towards women. India society is the product of so many different sub-societies, all having their own culture, tradition, way of thinking, look. It is a difficult job to find out a general Indian character. There are extreme difference from east to west and south to north. But, in any form or condition, women are not considered as important as men in both the societies. Traditionally, women have been discriminated in her access to productive resources and man along cannot bring overall development to the county, as women constitute a considerable part of the total population.

### **Women in Pakistan Society**

Exploitation of women is a common phenomenon in every society. And they are exploited in different ways in different societies. In the case of Pakistan, women are not only subjected to male domination, but they are also victims of inhuman customs and laws. They are there just to obey their fathers, brothers and husbands. They do not have the right to decide about themselves because women are considered as inferior creatures according to the dominant social and cultural norms. A woman's right to liberty is restricted in the name of modesty, protection and prevention of immoral activity. Marriage is a sort of trade between different families both in rural and urban areas. In rural areas 90% of women work in the fields. Every year 135,000 women die

during childbirth in Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> Only 21% of women have access to medical facilities during childbirth. Gender discrimination in Pakistan is so severe that women lived a subjected life from the cradle to the grave.

In Pakistan, gender discrimination begins in their childhood. Girls are not allowed to play like boys that can help in their speedy mental and physical development. The incidence of wife battering is common yet it is not even recognized as a pernicious form of violence against women. Even in the case where women receive serious injuries and want to file complaints, they are advised by the police to reconcile with their husbands, as any matrimonial dispute would bring *dishonour* to them. The Male family members keep a strict eye on the female family members in the name of *honour*. But one must understand the meaning of *honour means possession of women as a form of property*. In the name of honour women liberty is restricted and they are put into severe punishment if they lose their *honour*. Sexual assault on women, including rape, remains one of the most common crimes. The Human Rights Commission estimated thousands of rape occurs that go unreported. Another practice common in Pakistan is cutting off a women's nose if she is suspected of having an extra-marital relationship. In cases, where sexual intercourse is established but the absence of consent cannot be proved, the presumption that such intercourse occurred with the woman's consent can place her at the risk of prosecution. In Pakistan, 52% of women languishing in the jails are waiting for their fate in these cases. In the case of a woman marrying without the consent of her family, the marriage can be declared invalid and the couple would then be accused of the offence of *Zina* (adultery).<sup>53</sup> There were several women's movements against these criminal laws and customs. But these NGO dominated the movements (mostly) respect this system, its state and its laws. Their simply appeal to the ruling elite and their state to pass such laws that can abolish discrimination against women within the society.

Gen. Zia introduced a series of laws in his regime that gave legal sanction to women's subordinate status. The most relevant include the *Hudood Ordinances* which dealt which dealt with rape, fornication, prostitution, false testimony and alcohol, suggesting punishments for all these crimes. *Zina* was defined as willful sexual intercourse between a man and a woman "without being willfully married to each other", while *Zina-bil-zabr* means rape and the punishment would entail death for

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<sup>52</sup> Nora Fernandes, op.cit. pp. 125-158.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-117

married persons and 100 lashes for unmarried persons. But to prove the crime it required a confession before a court or the presence of four Muslims of good character who actually witnessed the intercourse. In case of women or non-Muslim witness *Hadd* would not be exercised and the crime would be a subject of punishment under the less stringent *Tazir*. Under *Tazir*, a rapist may be sentenced to up to 25 years in prison and 30 lashes. Women are scared of reporting rape the risk of being charged with violation of *Hadd* ordinances for fornication or adultery.

In the report of Amnesty International on honour killings, the law of *Qisas* and *Diyat* covering offences relating to physical injury, manslaughter and murder “reconceptualized these offences in Islamic terms as understood in Pakistan and replaced relevant sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) of 1860 which derives from British common law. That was promulgated as an ordinance in 1990, and since then was periodically re-promulgated till it was passed by parliament in 1997, without significant public or parliamentary debate. The law affects women adversely in many ways, at the same time, these laws do not allow mitigating circumstances to be taken into account in murder cases, a change which benefited women but has been undermined by judicial practice.<sup>54</sup> Murder is treated as private affair of the family and the crime is considered not against the state but individual victims. Domestic violence is treated more as a matter of civilian rather than criminal courts.

The rise of civilian regime after the death of Gen. Zia could not stop Violence against women. Various women political activists were tortured, there were several news on rape, molestation, killings. For instances, torture of Raheela Tiwana in custody in December 1990 and rape of Veena Hayat in her home in Karachi in November 1991. In a report on human rights violations in 1992 alone, 75 major cases of rape including 33 in interior Sindh were reported and in just three months 457 cases of sexual abuse against women were recovered.<sup>55</sup>

The efforts to promote an Islamic culture also resulted in injunctions on dress and suitable occupations for women. Conservative women wear the *burqa* (a long cloak which covers the head and face as well as the body) and moderate women veil themselves with a *chaddar* (a large shawl) or a *duppata* (a rectangular scarf). Educated

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<sup>54</sup> Dr. Savita Pande, ‘Violence Against Women in Pakistan,’ *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, Nos. 3-4, July-December 2002, p. 77

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*,

women are channeled into occupations dealing with women, such as education and medicine. They also staff female banks that deal only with women. Restrictions on their public activities include a prohibition on Pakistani women's participation in such international sports competitions as the Olympic Games.

In general, it is equally important to address the problems of female discrimination during adolescence and adulthood when women face several disadvantages, they enjoy fewer freedoms. Social norms, for instance, require girls to marry early and assume domestic responsibilities, often depriving them of pursuing educational and occupational opportunities. There is growing evidence to suggest that conditions of the child survival improve considerably in situations where women enjoy greater freedoms and participate in decision-making. At the same time, the distribution of work the household is typically biased against girl. Whereas boys are encouraged to go to school, their sister are made to stay at home and assist in domestic chores, when it fact both boys and girl should go to school, and both should assist in domestic work.

Discrimination base on sex can be seen in all fields of society and in human relations. Urgently needed is a revival of the celebration of a girl child that a duly recognize her vital role in ensuring continuity of a family, and highlights the importance to men and women alike of assimilating traditionally, *feminine* attributes of nurturing finding social cohesion and commonality, and in fostering harmonious relationships.

However, violence against women is rooted within the social system itself. The tragedy with the women's movements is that women from the upper classes, who mostly dominate them, have never had to suffer the same ordeals as the women of the oppressed classes. The adverse conditions in important sectors such as public hygiene, health and education, have a greater bearing on women of the working classes. This social psychology of the social mentality had become a cultural etiquette and instead, crossing this limit is assumed immoral. Therefore, the struggle for the rights of women and their liberation has different meanings for women of different classes in Pakistan. The kind of cultural outlook in Pakistan did not encourage women activists to think of a change in the cultural mindset of the people towards women. The concept of *empowerment* seems to be eroded in such an environment.



## Conclusion:

The worst example of gender discrimination is found in the region. The tradition of son preference discriminated girls from their conception/birth and continues to live a restricted and miserable life till death. The rich cultural heritage of this region is the mother of this violence against women. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of proper initiatives is the other problems that add salt to the wound. There is a popular general mindset and outlook that looked upon women as symbol of sex. It is true for the whole world; however, the intensity or the level of discrimination in this subcontinent is higher from other parts of the world. This is due to orthodox culture and lack of a concerted effort on the part of improving their condition; and in fact men's fear of losing control is the biggest obstacle to the process of women empowerment. But the line of argument is that the cultural harshness of Pakistan is the backbone of this fact. Cultural transformation is needed and it can bring enlightenment to the womenfolk. This cultural transformation does not mean *Christianization* or *Westernization*; it is a transformation from inside, the transformation of outlook of the society towards women. This can be achieved through proper education, not only the girl child but also the society as a whole. Until the outlook of the society is not changed any initiative regarding the empowerment of women would be the victim of counter interest. So, to study the cultural responsibility regarding the treatment towards women is very important.

No matter how far women have come out of their traditional status, they are still far behind their male counterparts. The material standard of a woman may be much higher, but society that runs against the human dignity of women is the main carrier of this psychology or the outlook.

Though, both India and Pakistan follow *patriarchal system* and has many similar social practices, there are so many other differences too. The Islamic and the Hindu cultural practices are different in many ways. However, when we talked about Indian culture the Islamic element also included.<sup>56</sup> So, to differentiate the two countries on religious line won't serve the purpose of the study. The important component is the general outlook of the two countries towards women and the factors in which the state, type of government, cultural transparency, cultural assimilation, modernization and along with them the changing attitudes of the people around. However, the conservative traditional attitudes that cultured this social outlook towards gender are still important,

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<sup>56</sup> India's Muslim population, minus the other communities, is larger than the population of Pakistan.

because in every angle this traditional practices and rituals are to be related. In both the countries every change in terms of gender outlook takes place with the urban elites. But women in the lower strata are still the same. Compare to Pakistan, the condition of Indian women is better with a more stable and a free society. Indian has a more transparent and better-assimilated society. The stability of the state structure is an advantage to the Indian women. This has to do with the human development and change in attitudes. A democratic culture that has rooted in India presents a much freer environment of individual development. But, this argument has not guaranteed of gender equality in India.

The gender outlooks of the people are determined by the socio-cultural factors like family structure, socialization process, inheritance pattern, cultural and religious practices, the role of the parents, the level of education etc. In India and Pakistan, the cultural psychology of the people towards gender is bias. The traditional concept of son preference exists in both the society. Women are considered inferior, weaker, and are burden to the family. The concept of male superiority is enriched by the cultural or social practices. However, masculinities not merely mediate between men and women, but also between men and men. Women are looked down as symbol of sex or reproductive machine. In every social practices and religious rituals women are not given any due importance. And this kind of social attitude towards gender relation only worsens the social importance and significance of women. A negative social psychology develops into the general mind. An age-old traditional or cultural outlook had developed that would be very difficult to wipe out from the general mindset. This general outlook towards women is the most dangerous problem in the process of empowering women. Empowerment from within, empowerment from the general mentality is the first step towards absolute empowerment. It is so because; the change in the material or outward look cannot be regarded as empowerment or equality of gender until the dark spot of the general mind towards women is removed. Wearing of jeans, working in offices, driving a car cannot substitute or compensate the thinking behavior of a society. That is just an outward look of *westernization*, not empowerment and not gender equality. Empowerment must look at just manner in every outlook and in every desire.

## Chapter3

### WOMEN AND LIFE WITH CULTURAL TABOO AND TRADITIONS:

In the first two chapters, we have discussed about the conceptual problem and the areas of problems faced by women in India and Pakistan. As we are aware of the study of cultural and historical importance in the process of empowerment, we can put the question of how far these two things have done to the dignity of women in the society. In this argument, let us extract all the possible material provided by the behavioral approach of studying problems of social relations and conflicts. Now, the importance of the study will get its focus to individual, family and the society respectively.

The family, rather than the individual, was looked on as the unit of the social system; thus the population of a given region was generally estimated in families rather than in heads. The bonds of family were such that relationships within the group were often blurred or lost sight of; for instance a son might commonly refer to all his father's wives indiscriminately as his mothers, and the distinction between brother and paternal cousin was not always made clearly – even today the same word is used for both.

The Indian and Pakistani family were, and usually still are, a joint one – that is to say a close link was maintained between brothers, uncles, cousins and nephews, who often lived under one roof or group of roofs, and who owned the immovable property of the line in common. Like the European and Semitic family, it was patriarchal and patrilinear. The father was head of the house and administrator of the joint property, and, except in Malabar, and in some part of the Northeastern state, the headship descended in the male line<sup>57</sup>.

The husband/father is allocated the role of head of the family and the household. This role of the husband automatically entitles him obedience from wife and children, an obedience which can be enforced not only through their economic dependence on him but sometimes also because of their legal dependence on him. The husband/father, the head of the family has in the past been legally entitled to use force to impose his wishes on wife and in practice is still able to do. The husband/father is still referred in all official documents as head of the family/household. This is done through state support to a specific family system, which is dependent largely on a male bread-

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<sup>57</sup> A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Rupa & co, Allahabad, 1954, p. 155

winner and female domestic servicing a system in which women's primary work is 'reproductive' in the sense of bearing-rearing of children and servicing other members of the family. Women as they tend to think only of household crafts. This type of bias has its roots in the attitude which regards women's income as only a supplementary or secondary activity that could be taken up, when women are free from their household chores which is still regarded as their primary occupation<sup>58</sup>.

The Indian society during the Vedic times, women were given high status. It is an old saying, "Where women are honoured, gods reside there."<sup>59</sup> She was known as 'ardhangini'-one half of the husband's body. At the time of marriage, she as a bride was entitled to procure certain solemn vows from the bridegroom before the ritual fire. No religious ceremony by the husband could bear fruit without her participation. As a mother, wife and sister she occupies an honorable place. She is the epitome of courage and boldness, love and affection, sacrifice and suffering. However, during the course of history women lost their honorable place or status due to social, economic and political factors. Evil customs like *sati*, *purdah*, child marriage, enforced widowhood, dowry system, crept into the society and this led to a decline in women's status inside and outside the home. During the last few years, sexual harassment at work place, eve teasing, abduction and female foeticide has given an inclination of the horrible behaviour patterns prevailing in the society. Majority of women live a life of dependency that does not possess any self-identity. The struggle for equality, justice and parity between women and men continues with more and more literature appearing on the subject on empowerment of women.

### **Woman in Patriarchy Society of India and Pakistan**

In the history of South Asia, women had high social dignity and were considered equally important with their male counterpart. But in the later Vedic time, women were relegated to the position of *sudras*. All these arguments are based on the consideration that when a baby girl is born the family celebrate on the presumption that a baby girl is the symbol of *Laxmi*. Despite this high respect, women still remain as *dashini*, meaning the submission of wife to the husband' or being 'servant.' The term *ardhangini*, meaning half of the husband, signifies equal sharing; however, when talk about *dasini*, the concept twist again. Women are put in the highest place and at the

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<sup>58</sup> Susheela Kaushik (ed), *Women's Participation in Politics*, Vikas publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.14

<sup>59</sup> A. L. Bashan, op.cit., pp. 154-57.

same time they are treated as servants. From their birth, women are kept under protection. And this protectionist culture spoil the human values of the womenfolk.

Both India and Pakistan are male dominated societies. All activities and ritual are revolved around male. The desire to have male child clearly evident from the traditional ceremonies of India. Rituals like *garbhadhana* to promote conception, *pumsavana*, to procure a male child, and *simantonnayana*, to ensure the safety of the child in the womb are still practiced. This male preference has been argued as an obstacle to the fertility decline if couples continue having children reaching their overall family-size goal because they are not satisfied with sex composition of their children.<sup>60</sup> This has some logical explanations in the unfavorable sex composition and population explosion in India.

A girl, on the other hand, was traditionally considered and is still held as incapable of either helping their parents in the other world or of perpetuating the line, for on marriage, according to orthodox practice, they became members of their husband's families. The necessity of providing them with dowries also lessened their desirability. There were thus very practical reasons why girls should be unwanted, and in a civilization so heavily weighted in favour of the male it is surprising that there is little evidence of exposure or infanticide of girls, and the same may well have been done by the very poor at all periods; but no special reference is made to exposure or infanticide in the early legal texts. In the best Indian families daughters, through their birth may have been regretted, were cared for and petted just as sons.

### ***The Tradition of Marriage***

The normal religious marriage was and still is arranged by the parents of the couple, after much consultation, and the study of omens, horoscopes, and auspicious physical characteristics. The couple was usually of the same class and caste, but of different *gotras* and *pravaras*, if they were of high class. Rules of prohibited degrees were very strict, especially in Northern India, where, even in a caste, which disregarded *gotra*, marriage was forbidden between persons with a common paternal ancestor within seven generations or a maternal ancestor within five. In the Deccan, however, this rule

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<sup>60</sup> P. Kalita and others, 'Son Preference and its Influence on Additional Desired Fertility,' *Indian Journal of Regional Science*, Kolkata, 2002, Vol.34, p. 19.

was not strictly followed, and there are records of cousin-marriage even in ruling families.

The institution of child-marriage, which became common in later times among well-to-do families, has no basis at all in sacred literature, and it is very doubtful whether the child-marriage of girls was at all common until the late medieval periods. The heroines of poetry and fiction are apparently full grown when they marry, and the numerous inscriptions, which throw much light on the customs of the time, give little or no indication of child-marriage. Ancient Indian medical authorities state that the best children are produced from mothers over sixteen, and apparently recognize the practice of child-marriage as occasionally occurring, but disapprove of it.

The reasons for the development of child-marriage cannot be given with certainty. Some have suggested that the fear of marauding Muslims encouraged parents to marry their daughters in childhood and to confine their wives more strictly in their homes; but both these customs existed in pre-Muslim times, so this cannot be the only reason.<sup>61</sup> It may in part be due to the growing religious insistence on the necessity of progeny, but this was not strong at all times. The sexuality of the Indian character may have played some part in it.

A general traditional opinion, woman was thought to be naturally libidinous; an unmarried girl attaining puberty would proceed to find a lover, however strictly her parents guarded her; once she had lost her virginity she would become unmarriageable and the parents would have the choice of the disgrace and expense of maintaining an unmarried daughter indefinitely, or the even greater disgrace of casting her out to become a beggar or a prostitute. From the point of view of her parents a daughter was a serious economic liability, and this may have encouraged the custom.

### *Traditional and Social Aspects of Divorce*

From the point of view of the Sacred Law, a Marriage was indissoluble once the seven steps had been taken together. Even if not consummated it could not be annulled, and divorce was quite impossible. An errant wife lost most of her rights, but her husband was still responsible for her bare maintenance if it was demanded, and she was not entitled to remarry. The law books vary in their attitude to the adulterous. Manu and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 4-11

some other sources even lay down that she should be torn apart by dogs. But the adulteress who strayed with a man of higher caste were fortunate; most authorities agree that she should be made to wear dirty clothes, sleep on the ground, and eat only enough food barely to sustain life, until her next menstruation; thereafter she might be restored to her husband's bed and her old position in the household.<sup>62</sup>

However, the *Arthashastra* shows that divorced was possible in early times, at least in marriages not solemnized by religious rites. In this case divorce was allowed by mutual consent on grounds of incompatibility. These provisions, however, do not appear in later law books, and were probably forgotten by Gupta times, when divorce became virtually impossible for people of the higher classes. Among many lower castes, however, divorce is still permitted by custom, and this must also have been the case in earlier days.

### ***Polygamy***

During the *Rig Veda* polygamy was not unknown. King and chiefs were almost invariably polygamous, as were many Brahmans and wealthier members of the lower orders. A husband was told to treat his wives alike, but this was a rule which could hardly be enforced by law and which was usually a psychological impossibility. Tied to her husband's home, the first wife often felt bitterly the happiness of her rival.

The practice of polygamy has been abolished in India and Pakistan long time back. However, there are still cases of practicing polygamy in the country sides. In rural India, the old traditional practices are still given its due respect. Even the practice of *sati* is not yet completely abolished. There are instances where sixty years old man marrying fourteen years adolescent. Now, the concept of polygamy might have change with the erosion of the values of the religious rituals. But, it is the concept, not the practice. This is one the worst development that is taking place in the place of abolition of old bad fashions.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

### *A Widow*

In general a widow could not remarry. By medieval times this rule was applied so strictly in the upper classes that it included even girls widowed in childhoods, whose marriages had not been consummated. Even the custom of *niyoga*, which gave the childless widow a chance to conceive a son by her brother-in-law, passed into desuetude in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Though there are lots of cultural and religious considerations, the problem of widow remarriage has not created so much of a problem in the present day society. Now, it is a question of family consent and the consent of the two. It is one of the developments that arise out of the process of modernization that started since long time and a positive result of the initiative of Ram Mohan Roy. Criticisms are not yet completely eroded by this process, when we look towards the rural lives of Pakistani and Indian women, the story is still different.

### *Women and Religion*

Religion has been a source of power for women as they worship God as Mother, or source of subordination or both. Religious authorities have often functioned as politically powerful figures. Other customs repressive and/or unhealthy to women—for example, *sati*, and ritual suicide by widows—are sanctioned by religion. Finally, the traditions of Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism all legitimate male authority, particularly patriarchal familial authority, over women: Christianity through biblical exhortation to wifely obedience, Confucianism in the three obediences, Hinduism in the Laws of Manu, Islam in the Qumran<sup>63</sup>,

However much these traditions carry profound gender inequalities in theology and in office, these same traditions spawn groupings that attract women (and other lower-status people). In India, the Gupta period, in which the Laws of Manu increased restrictions on Indian women, also witnessed the rise of Saktism, a cult derived from pre-Aryan traditions that envision the divine as feminine. In this set of beliefs, the female divinity appears in three major incarnations: Devi, the Mother goddess; Durga,

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara N., Ramusack and Sharon Sievers, *Women in Asia: Restoring Women To History*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1988, p. 26.



the unmarried and potentially dangerous woman; and Kali, the goddess of destruction<sup>64</sup>. Subsequently, in the Mughal period in South Asia, women in search of help with fertility or other psychological problems flocked to devotional Hinduism, becoming followers of *bhakti* saints, and to Muslim Sufi holy men. Women in the Middle East and in Muslim parts of Africa were also attracted to these mystical Sufi orders, which stressed direct union with *Allah* and believed there were no differences between men and women in their ability to reach God.

### *Sexual Relations*

Though the learned Brahmins who composed the *smṛiti* literature and laid down canons of behaviors for the Indian layman were puritanical in many respects, they did not disparage physical love. Of the three ends of life the third, pleasure, though less important than the other two, was a legitimate branch of human activity, for which provision had to be made in the scheme of existence. In its broadest sense the word *Kama* means desire of every kind and its fulfillment, but, like such English words as “desire” and “passion”, it usually had a sexual connotation. Of all legitimate pleasures sexual pleasure was thought to be the best.

When the process of cosmic creation was figured as the union of god and goddess, and figures of closely embracing couples (*maithuna*) were carved on the walls of temples. Some religious sects even introduced ritual intercourse as part of their cult, and a potent aid to salvation. But the exaggerated sexual religiosity, which was to be found in Indian social life at all times. Sexual activity was indeed a positive religious duty- the husband must have intercourse with his wife within a period of eight days at the close of every menstruation.

### *Sexuality and Reproduction*

Many theories about the origins of the operation of women see control of female sexuality and the productive process (or female pro-creative power) as central. For this reason, it is useful to examine basic questions, if not patterns, in societies' construction of female sexuality. Just as gender is socially constructed, so too is

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<sup>64</sup> Sivanadini Duraiswamy 'Hindu Dharma and Womanhood,' *Marga*, Colombo, Vol.10., 1989, p.13

sexuality that is, which sexual practices (and with whom) were considered socially acceptable and which were considered deviant are specific to time and place, and often contested. Scholarship on homosexuality, for instance, is in its infancy in many of these histories, particularly that regarding lesbianism. Some scholars, though, posit the harem or *zenana* as a site of lesbian relationships<sup>65</sup>.

Throughout history, societies have generated ideological systems that link female identity to female sexuality, and female sexuality to women's role in procreation. Thus one reason for controlling women's sexuality was to control their role in procreation. Women were aware of their important role in the procreative process, and sometimes used such sexual symbolism as a power play.

Religions project varied views of female sexuality. Islam acknowledges women's sexual pleasure, as it does men's, while advocating that it be channeled into marriage. In contrast, the Mahayana Buddhist views female sexuality as a threat to culture. In this religious group, women have been associated with bondage. Suffering, and desire; female sexuality, then, is to be controlled by transcendence (or by motherhood).

### **Traditional Socio-Religious Beliefs in Pakistan**

The social structure of Pakistan is based on deep-rooted cultural and traditional beliefs and values. The family system is patriarchic and patrilocal with strong gender biases perpetuated in society in contrary to the original teaching of Prophet. The Prophet Proclaimed, *the rights of women are sacred, see that they are maintained in the rights granted to them*. Islam affords a very status to women. But in reality the status afforded to Muslim women is far from the ideals of Islam. Their role today, as has been for generations, is largely confined to marriage, childbearing and housework, and she is traditionally expected to confine herself to this sphere alone<sup>66</sup>. Men have a dominant role as the household head, with the primary responsibility of financially supporting the family. There is generally a preference for joint family system, with a strong desire for having more sons than daughters. People living in different region/provinces speak their own local languages, especially in rural areas, and can be distinguished by their distinct

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27

<sup>66</sup> Roshana Mohamed, Status Of Women In Islam, Marga, (Colombo, 1989), Vol.10, p.27

ethno-linguistic groups and social customs. Despite this regional and cultural diversity, people are united by one common religion, Islam (97 percent of the population)<sup>67</sup>.

It is argued that religious values and cultural practices in traditional settings restrict women's decision-making options and freedom of movement at the same time that they encourage and favours their reproductive role. Recognizing the importance of the family as the basic social unit and the complementarity's of male and female roles in such societies, it is likely that women tend to plat a major role in household matters and exert substantial influence on domestic and reproductive decisions because they fall within the socially prescribed female domain.<sup>68</sup> In Muslim law of inheritance, the daughter's share is equal to one half of the sons in keeping with the concept that a woman is worth half a man. She has, however, and has always had full control over this property<sup>69</sup>.

Expressed through virginity and chastity, in several cultural *traditions* a woman's purity had implications for her family. A Muslim woman's behavior affected her family's honour, for example, resulting in the ultimate penalty of death for adultery. Infibulations (briefly, the sewing together of the labia and one form of female genital surgery), found in both Muslim and non-Muslim.”

Concubine, another institutionalized method of controlling female sexuality, existed in all the regions covered in this survey. Concubinage legitimated a man's sexual access to more than one woman outside of marriage. Although it clearly represented a double standard, concubine as an institution offered certain protections or benefits to women. In the New World some Amerindian women gained substantial wealth and status as concubines; in addition, slave concubines. Might be manumitted at their owner's death and their children legitimized. Similarly, Islamic slave owners manumitted some concubines, encouraged by the belief that God rewarded such action. The protections offered by the institution of concubine, albeit within a grossly unequal relationship, were lost with its abolition, and compensating institutions did not always

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<sup>67</sup>Naushin Mahmood, “Women’s Role in Domestic Decision-making in Pakistan: Implications for Reproductive Behaviour”, *The Pakistan Development Review*, (Islamabad, 2002), P.124.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.123

<sup>69</sup> Seema Durrani, “Property Rights of Muslim and Christian Women”, *Women and Empowerment*, (New Delhi), July-September 2003, P.61.

replace concubine. Hence, abolition in parts of Africa left poorer women, former concubines, without the legal rights of wives or concubines but still dependent financially. In contemporary Africa, women who in the past might have become concubines because of their economic or social vulnerability might today have children outside of formal marriage without the previous assurance that the fathers will support their children financially.<sup>70</sup>

### **Role of State in Perpetuating Traditional Belief**

The unwillingness of state to interfere effectively, almost gives a de facto legitimating to the monopoly of force by husband/father in the family. The government welfare programmes of animal husbandry, credit and similar other projects where governmental assistance goes in the name of the head of the household who is invariably male. Women are thus deprived of their rights as cultivators and also access to cash and suffer loss of power in the family structure. State by not challenging the traditional structure of family has made the services of subservient wife democratically available to practically the whole male population. State's support to such an ideology has resulted in sustaining a family system, which plays a repressive role on behalf of the states, both psychologically, as well as at the level of economic functioning. Several feminists have suggested that the welfare provision developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century represent a major link in the chain of women's dependence. They have created a more efficient structure for the reproduction of labour power based on family unit and women's labours as wives and mothers<sup>71</sup>.

The following domains help to understand the differences between men and women in terms of exercising power over one gender (women) by another gender (men) both within the society and between the societies.

1. *Right to own, pass on and inherit the properties.*
2. *The rights of men and women after the death of a spouse to the surviving partner.*
3. *The occupational activities performed by men and women.*

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-67

<sup>71</sup> See Barrett Michele, "Feminism & the Politics of State", *Women's Oppression Today*, 1980, pp.27-247.

4. *The freedom of men and women in enjoying sexuality, the right to initiate both marriage and divorce.*
5. *The degree of physical movement within the household and outside the household.*
6. *The opportunities to involve in politics, commerce and ritual spheres*<sup>72</sup>.

Often the control of female sexuality and reproduction is linked to concerns about purity. The Aryan notion of purity was reflected throughout Hindu ritual and beliefs, but in particular it provided the impetus for early marriage and for *sati*.

The point here is not to list the multitude of ways in which women have been unfairly treated, but to understand the cultural construction of female sexuality. These examples, all drawn from religious traditions or the ideological systems of states, highlight the control of female sexuality. But the earlier African examples remind us that sexuality and sexual symbolism, like all cultural phenomena, are a terrain of struggle, to be manipulated by women as well as used against them and saw sexual freedom as an integral aspect of women's rights.

Historically, prostitution has occurred under a variety of conditions that reflect different degrees of control of female sexuality. Prostitution may be seen as a strategy for a family's survival; Hindu *devadasi*, or temple dancers, served as prostitutes tied to temples. In the nineteenth century the British, in an attempt to limit military expenditures, provided prostitutes rather than wives for non-commissioned British troops in India. During the period of imperial expansion in the 1930s. Under these circumstances; prostitution did not mean increased autonomy for women, whether or not it provided subsistence.

In some places and times, however, prostitution has offered an alternative of increased autonomy. New colonial towns in Africa created spaces. For women to escape from abusive or unwanted marriages. There, operating entrepreneurs rather than under the supervision or other authorities. They supported themselves and their children by selling sexual and other domestic services to men, who frequently were migrant laborers. In addition, prostitutes were able to keep their children, an option that was not available to women in patrilineal marriages, where offspring belonged to the husband's

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<sup>72</sup> D. Thamizoli, "Gender Inequality, Tribal And Caste Women, Past And Present: A Case Study Of The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu", *Man in India*, Vol.77. March 1997, p.52.

patrilineage and were lost to a woman who divorced or absconded. Even under circumstances in which prostitutes had more control over their sexuality and their lives, it is important not to romanticize prostitution. It has been, and remains, an option for some women within a context of gender and class oppress.

We have little historical information about control of reproduction. But even prior to the recent rise of reproductive technology, women found ways to limit birth. Advances in reproductive technology such as amniocentesis, which project the sex of an embryo or fetus, have sometimes been used to select male children and abort female children. Thus birth control unambiguously empowers women, since the elements of choice and safety have been compromised. Here, we can note some of the state legislation that the government of India initiated towards women's emancipation. The National Commission for Women has in the last few years introduced several new bills in the parliament from time to time towards eradication of many social evils. Some of the significant enactments are mentioned here<sup>73</sup>:

- *The Hindu Widow Re-marriage Act of 1856*
- *The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929*
- *The Hindu Women's Right to property Act of 1937*
- *The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955*
- *The Hindu Succession Act of 1956*
- *The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956-57*
- *The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961*

The above mentioned are some important legislations which brought upward trend in the status of women in India. Today, what women are enjoying their status is because of legislations. She is protected in every walk of her life. Thanks to legislations, women in India are gaining better status, recognition and respect.

However, domestic violence against women has become rampant in India. Spouse abuses become a cancer to our society. A bill that is going to be introduced in the Parliament on domestic violence against women is indeed a timely safeguard to protect women's interests.

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<sup>73</sup>ibid, p.34

## Household Relations

Household relationships are at the heart of most societies, since families act as the primary culture-bearing unit. In pre-industrial societies the family is also an important economic unit.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the way that families are organized is linked as much to the relations of production as to culture. Among other factors, a sedentary, nomadic, or hunting- and-gathering lifestyle, sex ratios, or the availability of land can affect family organization-and all of these factors also help determine the relations of production and culture.

The domestic relationships and decision-making even between a husband and wife and their own children are often influenced by a wide variety of individuals and situations. Issues of polygamy, birth control, sexual conduct, education, allocation of economic resources, and so on are often group decisions, with elders frequently carrying more weight than younger members. The authority of a wide group of people who know about and sanction or approve behavior is accepted. Increasingly, however, factors such as class, personal mobility, and the proliferation of ideas about greater individual freedom are beginning to disrupt this pattern.<sup>14</sup>

Marriage was an important alliance that could not be viewed as a relationship between individuals, but between two kin groups, because the family was a primary unit for economic production and the concentration of wealth, for the allocation and legitimating of political power, and for conflict resolution. Consequently, marriages were often arranged for both women and men by other family members or by marriage brokers.

Gifts passed between families (and still do in many places) and between the bride and groom at the time of marriage. A bride to her marital home brought dowry, and other transfers, such as bride wealth or bride service, went from the groom (or his family) to the bride's family.

The treatment and rights of widows varied widely. During the Mauryan era in India (322-183 H.C.E.), widows could remarry, although they lost their rights to any

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<sup>74</sup> T. Chiranjeevulu, 'Empowering Women Through Self-help Groups: Experiences in Experiment,' *Kurukshetra*, Vol.51, No.5, March 2003, pp.16-20  
Ibid, no.5, p.31.

property inherited from their deceased husbands. During the Gupta era (320-540), however, the Laws of Manu severely limited women's rights in marriage, including the banning of widow remarriage. Though its origins are unknown, the ritual suicide of widows among the Hindu known as *sati* is one of the most controversial treatments of widowhood. A complex practice, it appears to have economic as well as socio-religious foundations.

Women's roles, status, and power within the family have varied both through times within the same society and from one place to another. As reflections of material culture, they tell us more about societies than about women's place in them. For the regional areas under discussion, we can see the common threads, but we can also distinguish the wide variation.

As we know, women are generally referred to as the fore-bearer of tradition and culture. But often in the names of tradition, culture and not to mention taboos become the building block of women's advancement. The practices in India and Pakistan were and are still interpreted to suit the need of some section of people or element in the society at the cost of women's advancement and progress. In olden days tradition, custom, culture and taboos were used as an instrument of social control and advancement. But as the time passed by, the orthodox religious elements interpret the traditional religious law rigidly, assigning some section of people as high and some as untouchables, together with innumerable ritual and ceremonies. The advanced tradition and cultural practice for various social controls was shrouded with many *do's*, *don'ts* and *can't do* in the later interpretation. This interpretation has also put women to the lowest strata in the social hierarchy and work against her will and interest in all sphere of development. These have been practiced and perpetuated even in the modern day in different forms. Though, women continue to bear the symbol of culture and tradition, but bear with injustice, violence and exploitation of all kind. Thus, women's advancement should be considered priority if the nations in South Asia wants to be in the path of progress in every aspects- socio-economic, polity, in short the overall development.

When we look at the advanced countries in the world and relatively advanced countries too, we find women's share countable in almost aspects. The tradition of submission and suppression through traditional bearings are found less. The state of



women's life (a cultural point of view) in India and Pakistan are found against the generally expected level of freedom. In one way or other, women are found captive and are made unable to grow and share in the general progressive struggle of their own nation.

### **Conclusion:**

We have discussed, in brief, the position of women in India and Pakistan, under the strict rules of traditional beliefs. As far as the discussion is concerned, we find a hypothesis that the society itself is manipulating the share of women. They are still far from emancipation. And the urgent call of the time is to study more on the behavior of gender relation in the family, work place, social remedies and so on. The cultural beliefs that the study already cited in the previous chapters is the main problem towards the process of fully empowering and emancipating women from the social evils. Besides so much of struggle, they still remain as before. It is all because the originating factors have not been targeted; instead, the policy and programmes are aiming at the broad frameworks that only takes them to equalize in material terms. It can be noted that with the emergence of modernization and urbanization along with the lately developed concept- *Globalization*, women in both India and Pakistan have achieved far reaching achievement. However, driving a car, wearing jeans do not wipe out the mindset that she is a daughter, wife or mother. They are not yet getting the required respect that the society is supposed to guarantee. Even a lay man walking on the road or a simple auto driver in the city, either in Karachi or Mumbai, abuse and teases a well dressed, car driven lady. Being woman is still a curse.

So, we can ask whether material achievement, through or by virtue, can bring a women to the desired status in the society? Of course not, because the cultural mentality that the people in the society has is not desirable in the process of empowering women. That cultural mentality or the outlook of the society is the creation of the tradition that are nurtured through ages. Then, how do we get succeeded in empowering women in these kind of societies? What are the remedies? The next chapter will deal with this dilemma.

## Chapter 4

### ROLE OF EDUCATION AND ECONOMY IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

The most important tool for social change is education. In the present transforming phase, women's education is the core of development strategy. The priority to educate all and to get education is morally and economically urgent than ever. It is understood from the studies of different countries that well-run education programmes have proved to be the best value investment for development. Education has moved from being the floor on which a country can build its competitive success. Taking into account the primary purpose of this study, the importance of education and improved economic condition of women would not only help in the progress of a nation, it also helps in changing the age old traditionally framed mindset of patriarchy societies towards women.

In India, in the early 1990s much of the emphasis was placed on quantitative goals such as increasing the number of pupils enrolled in school. By the middle of the decade, however, political and educational leaders had become increasingly mindful of the fact that enhanced access in the absence of quality instructions is a hollow victory.<sup>75</sup> It is widely recognized that devoting resources to quality education for women is one of the best investments that any society can make. The broad social benefits of women's education range from increased family health and nutrition whose significance is manifested through their impact on subsequent generations.

Extending basic education to girls and bridging the gender gap are identified as priorities. But progress towards these goals over the past decade has been slow for various reasons including entrenched discrimination against females. However, in some countries the progress in narrowing the gender gap is actually a result of decreasing enrolment of boys. Education is the foundation of development. Experience also shows the importance of concentrating efforts on education for women, as two-thirds of the world's illiterates are women.

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<sup>75</sup> Aparna Mahanta, *Women's Movement: Perspectives and Strategies*, in Susheela Kaushik, ed., 'Women's Participation in Politics,' Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997, pp-113-125.

## Priority Importance of Women's Education

There are many obstacles in bridging gender gaps in education, but none of them are insurmountable once the policy makers, political leaders and parents see the need to educate girls. In many societies the benefits of girls and women education overtly manifested – such as knowing their rights, protection against violence, protection against diseases and unwanted pregnancy, and leading to economic empowerment. But when they consciously or subconsciously denied educational opportunities to girls, it manifested a society towards doomed. This can be seen from several countries where girls' education is selective and inclusive, only taught how to be a good wife or mother. Education for girls and young women is still treated as an optional area to be pursued when other more urgent need are met than to liberate the human potential.<sup>76</sup> In this regard the economic contribution of the half of our young people happened to be female. Looking this potential course, the leaders started realizing the importance of education for all, especially of girls' education. However, the gap of literacy between man and woman in India and Pakistan is very high. There are physical as well as cultural obstacles in narrowing this gap. There has been a culture of male preference not only in education but also in every aspects. The general mentality of this society goes against girl child and is the biggest obstacle. Education is not yet consider the primary carrier of social change and development. The general people are still living with the age old tradition or thinking of being survived with whatever they got from god. The concept of social change can be seen only in the urban areas.<sup>77</sup> And that too has not given full priority and freedom in carrying out the dreams of education. There are number of women who got educated but not freed to render their educational fruits. They are put in as soup in the society as daughter, wife and mother. The right to live as a full human being among the general women has been a dream which is not yet realized. And that is culture that comes on the way to protect the idea of male preference against the notion of human development and in support of the very idea of male domination.

Poverty is frequently offered as a reason for marrying off young girls, but it can be argued that the more powerful motive is the cultural conservatism that assigns no value to girls except as future wives and mothers. A girl's future is often pre-determined

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp 115-116

<sup>77</sup> Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2002, pp 1-9.

and her choices and options are determined by cultural norms and practices.<sup>78</sup> Culture that denies choice to women must be changed.

To enhance women's education, suggestion of the following strategic implications has been made include: technology for basic education as a strategic approach; overcoming obstacles to education needs and making inclusive education a reality; making primary education universal and free; expanding access to early childhood development programmes; designing basic education content to meet the needs and values of society; enabling teachers to enable learners; assessing learning achievement; promoting population and reproductive health, especially among young women through basic education; building social integration through bilingual and mother tongue education; a fresh start to school health improving learning and educational outcomes by improving health, hygiene and nutrition; promoting basic education and democracy and including the excluded: enhancing educational access and quality.<sup>79</sup>

Over the past thirty years, many countries, which have invested in education for women as part of their education priorities and as part of an integrated approach to social development, have seen excellent results. As a group, they have slower population growth, faster economic growth and higher level of social cohesion.<sup>80</sup> It is time for all countries to put aside their doubts and fears about educating women and give it the highest priority.

The government of India initiated the programme, Education for all (EFA), in order to check the inequality among various sections of people and gender. Education is a key to the fulfillment of human rights. It is the heart of all development and it is the essential pre-requisite for equality, dignity and lasting peace. While keeping these views in mind there should be a framework for action committing our governments to "the achievement of education for all (EFA), goals, targets for every citizens and society without discrimination between development of male and female."

Education for all should be considered as the most urgent call of the time. Therefore, there arises an urgent need to concentrate on the most vulnerable and

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<sup>78</sup> Ram Ahuja, 'Social Problems in India,' Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2003, pp 243-256.

<sup>79</sup> Padmini Swaminathan *op.cit.*, pp. 45-55.

<sup>80</sup> Ram Ahuja, *op.cit.*, pp 251-259

excluded children and the importance of maintaining a focus on the education of girls and women. Taking into account, the following specific goals related to EFA have been suggested.<sup>81</sup>

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- Ensuring that by 2010 all children particularly girls in difficult circumstance and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adult are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes.

It can be noted that the democratic government of India have initiated various educational programmes to uplift girls education since independence. Comparatively, the initiatives taken by the Pakistani authority, whether military or civilian government are very less. Legal reforms of almost all the regimes were more than an attack on women's rights and identity. Till 1970's all the women organizations were traditional such as *All Pakistan Women's Association* (1949). A relatively stronger initiative towards women's movement for their protection of rights was seen with the coming of Gen. Zia. However, there has not been any concrete step towards utilization of the

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<sup>81</sup> Beet Shah and B. R. Kukreti (1997), 'Women Education Scenario in India with Special Reference to Science and Technological Education, National Seminar on Women's Participation in Science Technology and Management Education, February 13-15 at Rohilkhand University, Bareilly.

benefits that can be generated through girls education.<sup>82</sup> There had been woman premier in the past, however the question of gender inequality was put behind while doing the so call political race. Religious priority has been given the utmost importance in every politico-economic consideration.<sup>83</sup> And the general religious practices go against the notion of women empowerment and enhancement. To their concept, empowerment of women stands at the expense and interest of patriarchy culture and the very core idea of practical religious fundamentals.<sup>84</sup> So, women are treated as lesser human beings and are subject to complete subjugation under the patriarchy culture.

### **Higher Education and Women**

Women should be integrated to the higher level of the society and that is possible only through giving them higher education. Still, their level of participation in the higher education is very low. The cultural constraints are the obstacles to the process. It is considered that women are not capable or not necessary to climb the ladder where they are not fit to be. However, the question of fitness to be there in the higher ladder of the society has been discarded. Education is the process of emancipation. It is the process of learning and understanding about beingness and about existence. Every bid of life is considered education. The understanding that education provides about the rationality of life is the only weapon to eradicate the evil outlook of the society that are created by the aged old beliefs.

When we study a particular area of problem it is very important to note and compare ourselves with other countries. Keeping the point in mind, some comparison are also made in this paper. Generally it is viewed that education empowers women by building up their confidence and enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives. This statement may be relating to the university degree, income or career fulfillment. There has been remarkable growth in the number of women enrolled in the institutions of higher education from 0.04 lakhs in 1950-51 to 20.65 lakhs in 1994-95. The share of women in total enrolment higher education has steadily increased from 11 per cent in 1954-57 to 34 percent in 1994-95. Their number in science and technology

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<sup>82</sup> Anis Haroon, 'Historical Overview of Women's Movement in Pakistan,' in Nighat Said Khan, Rubina Saigol and Afiya Shehribano Zia (eds.), *A Celebration of Women*, ASR Publication, Lahore, 1995, pp. 61-72. Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

in absolute terms has increased from 2.87 lakhs in 1986-87 to 3.59 lakhs in 1990-91 and further to 3.96 lakhs in 1992-1993 (as shown in Table 1).<sup>85</sup>

Table 1:

Faculty	Science	Eng & Tech	Medicine	Others	Total
1986-87	231	13	39	4	287
1990-1991	289	17	49	4	359
1994-1995	319	19	54	5	396

*Fig: faculty-wise growth of women enrolment in higher education*

*Sources: Final report of the world education forum Dakar, Senegal 26-28 April 2000.*

There is little systematic data available at international level on women in higher education (vocational education). In Engineering, the first woman who obtained graduate degree globally was in 1882.<sup>86</sup> participation of women in these very sectors are important. It is because those women in higher strata cite the example of what they also can do and the future will follow them. It is also the fall of the curtain that kept women for long time under the belief that they are the bearer of child and they are less stronger. The success of few is the torch light of numerous women. However, the most unfortunate is the time passed and the number of women produced in the higher strata of the society. Thorough the world the number is still few and that too the most successful women or the most numbers are concentrated to few developed countries. The case of South Asia is very slow. The data on share of women in science and technology combined disciplines and their employment performance for the recent years is shown in Table 2 for selected countries.

At same time, no development strategy is better than one that involves women as central players. It has immediate benefits for nutrition, health, saving and reinvestment at the family, community and ultimately at the national level. In other words, educating women is a social development policy that works. It is a long-term investment that yields an exceptionally high return. It is also, a tool for preventing conflict; women have passed on the culture of peace.<sup>87</sup> When ethnic tensions cause or exacerbate conflict, women tend to build bridges rather than walls. When considering

<sup>85</sup> Human Development Report (1995), United Nations Organizations, New York.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Yogendra Singh, op.cit., pp. 122-158

the impact and implications of war and peace, women think not only of themselves, but also about the future of their children.

Democracy is not possible until and unless we have educated and enlightened citizens. It is about being able to earn an income when women before you earned none, about protecting yourself against violence and enjoying rights which women before you never knew they had; about lacking part in economic and political decision making and finally it is about educating your children to do the same, and their children after then. It is about ending a spiral of poverty and ignorance, which previously seemed to have no end.

Table 2:

Country	Year	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Ireland	1992	3.0	10.0	20.0
U. K	1987-88	3.0	6.0	14.0
Netherlands	1988	2.1	4.6	14.7
FRG	1990	2.6	7.3	24.2
Portugal	1984-85	8.2	26.5	36.2
Turkey	1989	20.0	23.0	27.0
U.S.A	1992	14.4	28.9	42.3

*Fig: Percentage share of women for all science disciplines at different levels of employment*

*Source: Final report of the world education forum Dakar, Senegal 26-28 April 2000.*

The above table shows low level of women participation in science and technology in general, and in higher positions in particular. Indian situation is somewhat similar to the general situation of women in all other countries.

We must build and expand partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector. The initiative will be a test for all of them. It will be a test for all government in developing countries, a test of their willingness to make women education a real priority. And it will be a test of donor countries, a test of their leadership mobilizing resources. Finally, the initiative will be a test for communities and



families, a test of their understanding that education is help, not a hindrance in building a strong and healthy family structure, and improving a family's fortune. Thus, women's education is the key for enabling succeeding generations to succeed.

### **Empowerment of Women through Education and Training**

One of the most critical component in the development of a society is the investment in human development. The South Asian countries are poorest, most literate, malnourished and least gender-sensitive. The human Development Report on South Asia (1998) shows that South Asia has the lowest adult literacy rate (49 per cent) in the world which is lower than that of sub-Saharan Africa (57 per cent). In India public primary education facilities have been expanded and national literacy shows an increase of 12 percent between 1991 and 1997. Participation of women in educational programmes has grown faster than that for men. Female literacy increased two and half times faster than male literacy between 1970 and 1990. India accounts for 30 percent of the total adult illiterates all over world till the mid of 1990's. Poverty and other economic and social pressures continue to be the major challenges to the achievement of education for all. Keeping girls out of school is costly and undermines development. Poverty can be effectively tackled by educating the girls. Educated women keep their families healthier, show concern about their children's education and nutrition.

Total Literacy Campaign started by the National Literacy Commission in some regions in India brought rapid social change. For example, in Nellore, in Andhra Pradesh Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) gave the poor women a sense of identity, enhanced status and self- image.<sup>88</sup> Literacy campaigns were used as a strategy for mobilization of poor women. The motivating factor and key to mobilization was the "Kalajatha"- a powerful medium that packed its messages in the popular cultural idiom and forms. Messages also linked literacy with basic problems of livelihood and enable them to question the exploitation of the poor and the women in the society. The final message was to escape from poverty and resist operation. These messages struck a chord of sympathy among women of the weaker sections. Women participated in the massive environment building, met daily for evening classes and participated in the discussions with men on various issues. The campaign was perceived to be legitimate by the conservative sections of the society because it was supported by both government

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<sup>88</sup> T. Chiranjeevulu, op.cit., p. 17

and non-government organizations. Women also started a protest movement against alcoholism. the anti- arrack agitation in this district of Nellore in 1991. The next phase was the massive thrift movement that is, Podupulakshmi: (Podupu means savings, Lakshmi being the goddess of wealth) phase where women were mobilized to form savings groups.<sup>89</sup> These movements have made significant community development. The Nellore women's movement is a broad democratic movement where millions of women were mobilized by the NGOs to participate in their own development collectively. Opportunities for such mobilization were not limited to anti-arrack and savings but spread to other social issues like health, pollution, violence, etc.

Thus, it is the popular or transformational education, which is the basis of transforming women. Popular education is based on a critical analysis of unjust social, political and economic systems and a vision for a more just and equitable society. It is a process in which women would develop awareness collectively and make an effort to change it. The objective of the popular education is to end economic exploitation, political domination and cultural dependency. Its ultimate goal is to build a new more humane and just society. In the process of popular education, the teacher does not play the role of an expert in knowledge, which is to be imparted to the student. The role of teacher or educator in the popular education is to share knowledge with the people and learn by doing. Teacher and student have equal power, and learning is participatory whereby people are involved in the process of research, education and organization.

### **Resurgence of Women Activism in India**

An assessment at what happened to Indian women after independence was one factor that launched a new women's movement in India during the 1970s. The United Nations declaration of 1975 to 1985 as the Decade for Women stimulated the appointment of a government commission to prepare a report on the current status of women in India for submission to the UN. The Committee on the Status of Women, composed of nine women and one man, *was* shocked by their research, which documented distressing conditions for many women in independent India. Their report, *Towards Equality*, revealed that the ratio of women to men had begun to decline from the 1901 census, when it was 971 women to 1,000 men, to the 1971 census, when it reached 930, women to 1,000 men. (After rising to 934 women in 1981, the ratio was

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 18-9

929 women to 1,000 men in the 1991 census).<sup>90</sup> Further research ascertained that despite legal equality, this drop reflected continuing malnutrition and higher rates of mortality among women, girl babies, and very young girls. Another startling finding was the declining number of women in paid employment, particularly in the agricultural and unorganized manufacturing sector, where unskilled women had the greatest scope for employment. Professional women had increased their employment and seemed the one group of women rewarded by independence. Yet at this time journalists, such as Pro mill a Kapur (1974), and social scientists, most notably Rama Mehta (1970), were publishing books and articles suggesting that middle-class women had numerous complaints (Liddle and Joshi 1986; Mies 1980).

Shortly after *Towards Equality* was submitted in December 1974, Indira Gandhi imposed an Emergency in June 1975, which restricted the exercise of civil rights because of an alleged threat to national security. Women activists soon were protesting against the suspension of civil rights, the stringent promotion of birth control measures by Sanjay Gandhi (the younger son of Mrs. Gandhi), police rape of women detained in local jails (custodial rape), and the newly emerging phenomena of bride burnings or dowry deaths (Katzenstein 1989; R. Kumar 1994; Gmvedt 1980). Campaigns on the latter two issues resulted in legislation but revealed once again the often ambivalent impact of legal acts. In the 1980s a feminist campaign for more stringent laws punishing rape, focusing on the brutal impact of violence against women, was taken over by politicians who sought legislation to protect the honor of women and their families. When a law was enacted in 1983, it defined custodial rape, which carried a mandatory sentence of ten years, but remained silent on familial or marital rape (R. Kumar 1994).

Although a Dowry Prohibition Act had been passed in 1961, the giving of dowry spread during the 1960s and 1970s to groups further down the social hierarchy and to new areas in south India where dowry had not been given. This extension seems to be related to growing affluence in certain groups and the desire to translate economic gains into increased social prestige by marrying daughters into higher social groups and by following the customs of those social groups. In Delhi area there was increased press coverage of instances where a new bride was burned to death, supposedly because of an accident while cooking. Because of the Hindu practice of cremation within twenty-four hours of death, it was frequently difficult to obtain evidence needed to establish the

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<sup>90</sup> Population Census 1991, Government of India Report, and also see Bipin Chandra and other's- *India After Independence*, Penguin Publications, Kolkata, 2000.

probability of murder.<sup>91</sup> Still, investigations of some bride burnings and the actions of courageous parents of dead brides, with the support of some women's groups, have focused attention on this phenomenon.

Protest against police rape and bride burnings coalesced with protest against the Emergency to create a new wave of feminist activism during the late 1970s. Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj (1987) have outlined six types of women's organizations besides mainstream groups such as the AIWC and the YWCA.<sup>92</sup> They include agitational consciousness-raising groups; mass-based organizations, including trade unions and tribal associations; groups that provide services to needy women; professional women's organizations; women's wings of political parties; and research networks that include both academics and activists working to provide documentation on women's issues. Like its early twentieth-century predecessors, this women's movement utilized legislation, new associations, and the press as its instruments to improve the condition of women. Examples of legislation are the efforts to secure tighter laws to stop the giving and the taking of dowry. Associations took new forms, such as *Saheli* (girlfriend"), a Delhi collective which seeks to inform women of their legal rights and assist them in obtaining employment, especially when they decide to divorce. The use of the press includes articles in general newspapers but also in newly established feminist journals such as *Mamushi (Woman)* and books issued by a feminist press, Kali for Women. There are also new institutions. Women's Studies emerged first at SNDT Woman's University in Bombay in 1973 and has developed as a field of teaching and research that focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on issues with policy implications. By the mid-1990s there were twenty-three women's studies centers in India. On the theoretical level, women activists have debated sharply about the validity of characterizing this women's movement as feminist since feminism is seen as embedded in socio-economic conditions in Europe and the United States and distinctly middle class in its composition and goals. More recently some Indian women have contended that there are multiple feminisms, some of which can supply modes of analysis useful in the Indian context.<sup>93</sup> A second point of difference is the desirability of autonomy or separation of the women's movement from political parties on both left and

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<sup>91</sup> *The Times of India* Editorial, Delhi, 22 March 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Mrinal Gore, *Women in the Political Process: What Does It Mean?* in Susheela Kaushik (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 1-13.

<sup>93</sup> Jessie B, Tellis-Nayak and Merlyn Lobo Brito (eds.), *Indian Women Forge Ahead*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 99-108

right, because these organizations are judged to subordinate women's issues to party objectives (Krishnaraj n.d.).

The revived women's movement which dates from the early 1970s differs from earlier ones because of the emergence of grass roots women's groups among lower-class women which include organizations among tribal and *dalit* (oppressed-untouchable) women in Maharashtra; women in Himachal Pradesh who participated in Chipko, an effort to conserve forests; and peasant women in Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, and Bihar (Amrita Basu 1992; Bhushan 1989; Everett 1986; Gulati 1981; Jain 1980; Jain and Banerjee 1985; Kishwar and Vanita 1984; R. Kumar 1994). Although both leftist political parties (Marxist and socialist) and feminists have sought to shape the direction of these mass movements, the 'groups have courageously tried to evolve programs which seek to address the condition of women qua women, as well as *dalits* or peasants. Thus they raise such topics as gender oppression within classes because of such factors as alcoholism and lack of women's access to land when land rights are redistributed. They also tackle difficult issues like the double sexual standard and sexual terrorism, which make it hard for women to participate in political organizing. They criticize Marxists for subsuming women's issues under class struggle and feminists for their lack of sustained attention to economic issues (most notably equal wages and property rights), their disinterest in political power, and their unproductive theoretical debates (Omvedt 1993). Many of these lower-class mass movements exist for relatively short periods because they work against overwhelming material constraints. One relatively long-lived effort to organize lower-class urban women for the purpose of obtaining legal rights and improving<sup>94</sup> their access to economic resources is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmadabad. In 1972 Ela Bhatt began to organize women ragpickers and sidewalk vegetable vendors to obtain access to low-cost credit and education, and SEWA has expanded its range of activities to include organizing women workers in the informal sector to bargain for better working conditions (Everett 1983; Selliah 1989).

By 1990 new areas of concern emerged. One key issue revolves around amniocentesis. In the Delhi area and in the surrounding states of Punjab and Haryana, clinics began to do amniocentesis primarily to determine the sex of the fetus, and then performed abortions if the sex was not the one desired. Since estimates that up to 99

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<sup>94</sup> Fatterman, D. M., Kkaftarian, J. S., and Wadersman, A. (eds.), *Empowerment Evaluation- Knowledge and Tools for Self Assessment and Accountability*, Sage Publication, n.a., 1996, p. 104-

percent of such abortions are of female fetuses, some women activists have demanded the prohibition of amniocentesis and secured passage of such legislation in Maharashtra in 1988. Others call for a ban on advertising by such clinics. Women's control over their reproductive activities remained highly contested in other ways. The state-supported family planning program has retreated from the coercive measures utilized during the emergency from 1975 to 1977. Still, some feminists are disturbed by its orientation toward lower class women, its carelessness about women's health, and its willingness to experiment with controversial contraceptives. Furthermore, the greater preference for female sterilization as opposed to male sterilization reflects a continuing undervaluing of women's health (Parikh 1990).

During the 1990s the recurrence of religious fundamentalism or what some feminist scholars have defined as religious nationalism, which emphasizes the political manipulation of religious symbols has affected women adversely. Among Muslim women in India as well as Pakistan and Bangladesh, there is increasing stress on the need for veiling and for the imposition of Muslim laws on all personal relationships in order to reaffirm religious commitment. The *Shah Bano case*<sup>95</sup> discussed above is only the most recent example of how the individual rights of women are circumscribed in campaigns to construct a communal identity in a post-modern nation-state (Pathak and Rajan 1989; Hasan 1993).

For Hindu women in India, religious fundamentalism, religious nationalism, and ethnic honor have merged in two spectacular episodes. One was Roop Kanwar's alleged *sati* in Deorala, about fifty miles from Jaipur, in September 1987. Upon the death of her husband of six months, the eighteen-year-old widow allegedly joined her husband on his funeral pyre. About ten thousand people witnessed the illegal event, of which the local police-claimed to be unaware and therefore did nothing to prevent. Women's groups protested strongly to the Rajasthan state government and to the central government, and legislation was consequently passed to prevent future *satis* (Oldenburg 1994; Sangari and Vaid 1996).

The other instance is the growing involvement of Hindu women in the revival of Hindu nationalism associated with the Ram Janambhoomi movement (Sarkar and Butalia 1995). On December 6, 1992, Hindu militants destroyed a mosque (Babri

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<sup>95</sup> For detail see D. D. Basu, *Introduction to The Constitution of India*, Wadhwa and Company, Nagpur, 1999.

Masjid) at Ayodhya in north India, constructed in the sixteenth century by the Mughal emperor Babur after he supposedly destroyed a temple on the site of the alleged birthplace (Ram Janambhoomi) of Ram, the god-hero of the epic *Ramayana*. Three interlocking institutions—the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an electoral party; and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a world Hindu cultural association that appeals to Indian Hindus living abroad—promote the Hindutva movement, which seeks to transform India into an avowedly Hindu nation. Hindutva propaganda, disseminated through modern media such as tape cassettes and films, articulates hatred toward a secular state characterized as corrupt and repressive and a Muslim minority constructed as pampered and abusive. Individual women are prominent in the BJP, most notably Vijayraje Scindia and Uma Bharati, and Sadhvi Rithambara is a fiery preacher for the VHP. Amrita Basu (1993) has probed how this trio of women leaders have been able to utilize the Hindutva movement to achieve personal and political goals, while at the same time they displace frustrations with Hindu patriarchal practices from Hindu to Muslim men and render Muslim women invisible. The RSS has also developed an extensive women's wing with an impressive base among high-caste, middle-class, urban Hindu women. Although their members enter the public sphere of politics through Hindu nationalism, their activism does not necessarily challenge gender inequality or create feminist consciousness or solidarity (Bacchetta 1993, 1996; T. Sarkar 1993c). In the aftermath of devastating communal rioting in Bombay in January 1993, in which Hindu women actively collaborated with the Shiv Sena in attacks on Muslim neighborhoods and Muslim women sought to protect their male relatives from attacks, Flavia Agnes acknowledged that gender solidarity could not overcome communal tensions and called for the evolution of a new secular framework (Agnes 1994).

### **Resurgence of Women Activism in Pakistan**

A social movement is a process to attain structural changes at economic, social, political and cultural levels. These changes are possible if it is a collective movement of people with clear perceptions of their situation and needs. The goal of such a movement is social justice for those who are discriminated against along the lines of caste, race, religion or sex within society.

The women's movement in Pakistan has to be seen against the background of the practical problems evident in the changing social institutions and attitudes and methods employed in overcoming these. These, in turn are determined by the different strategies based on the specific historical background of the women's movement. This background whether historical or current, has been created by a linkage of external and internal forces. Its beginnings lie in the nationalist struggles of the late nineteenth century, to achieve political independence, followed by the assertion of a national identity and with achievement of independence, creating a modern society. Both the political awakening and mobilization of women began, as an integral part of the larger political movements. In the late nineteenth century, in the struggle against colonization, the specificity of the struggle of Muslim women, was directed towards their rights to education to liberate from shackles of ignorance and to enable their participation in the new economic and social environment.

Major debates had begun on nationalism independence and Islam linked to women's rights. Issues of education and seclusion and polygamy were picked up. The first major mobilization of women took place during the *Khilafat Movement*, completely overshadowed by Muslim men. Bi Ama, mother of Moulana Mohammad Ali and Shoukat Ali was the first to tour the country for rising funds. She addressed the all men Muslim League conference and other gatherings from behind the veil, which she lifted in 1921. her symbolic act was not viewed as an act of emancipation or influence of the west. It was simply interpreted as hindrance in her work and she was an old lady, it was accepted. At that stage, men encouraged women's entry into politics. It was an old lady, it was a support not a defiance. But the issues of polygamy and Muslim women's rights within the family were pushed under the carpet.

The second major mobilization of women took place during the Pakistan movement. In 1940 a large number of women attended the Muslim League *jalsa* in Lahore. The first major demonstration took place when '*Khaksar Tehrik*' (a nationalist organization) was banned. A large number of *burqa* clad women came out, led by a ten year old girl. Next to come was a mixed demonstration in 1941 in which women marched with men to press their political demands. In 1942, the Muslim Girls Students Federation was formed and became active in politics Mohammad Ali Jinnah took a direct interest in women's participation and reforms. A women's committee was formed to tour the country and make proposals. Various sub-committees were set up to look into the affairs of women. In 1943, relief work for the Bengal famine had started and a large



number of women participated in it. In the All India Muslim League annual session in Karachi, a large number of women were present and formed the Women's Guard and started collecting funds and enlisting. It is interesting to note that *purdah* was discarded and a new uniform was accepted without criticism. Begun Tassaduq Hussain and Begun Shahnawaz contested the 1946 elections. About five hundred women came out on the streets when the Muslim League was not allowed to form the government. Others came out to court arrest and Begun Kamal-uddin from the Frontier was arrested. The next day, women were again on the streets and met with brutal force. They were baton charged and arrested. In prison, there *burqa* clad women climbed the building to hoist the flag, while others sang and chanted slogans for freedom and were beaten up by the police. In February, thirteen year old Fatima Sughra climbed the secretariat building and replaced the Union Jack with the Muslim League flag made out of her *dupatta*.

In 1947, in NWFP Pathan women demonstrated on the streets unveiled. They scaled walls to hoist flags and were lathi charged, tear-gassed jailed and faced bullets. In April, 1,500 women took part in a public protest and picketing. Their number had increased and protest continued till 1947. In Sindh, the Hari Tehrik women were participating in anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles. Nationalist struggles liberated women from the home and seclusion and gave them experience in political activism. Their right to vote receive education and own property was acknowledged by now. But their demand for inheritance an end to dowry and polygamy fell on deaf ears. While some leaders like Jinnah felt the need to break the shackles of women's bondage others felt that after the crisis ended women should go back to their earlier roles.

Women's mobilization during the Pakistan Movement was directed towards the settlement of refugees. Both in the Punjab and Sindh, they were involved in the refugee camps for months together. In 1948 Begum Rana Liaquat Ali formed the Women's Voluntary Service Women who had never left homes came out for social work. The Pakistan Women's National Guard and The Pakistan Women's National Reserve, set up in 1949, were formed under the Chief Controller, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali, who occupied the rank of a Brigadier. It was a bold step to make women independent enough to use weapons and be a part of the country's defense. But both organizations came under heavy criticism and were finally disbanded in 1954. Women's voluntary service (WVS) in contrast, was well received as it concentrated on social welfare which was an extension of Women's domestic role and did not disturb social relations within family.

The Women's voluntary service was turned into *the All Pakistan Women's Association* (APWA). On 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1949, around hundred members met in Karachi to form APWA. Begum Rana Liaquat Ali became the founder president. APWA was a non-political organization of women. Creating job opportunities and educational facilities for women were the basic objectives. Several girls schools, health centers and industrial homes were established. Later, APWA assumed as the principal NGO of the country with consultative status with UN agencies. The maulvis disapproved of the initiatives of the APWA. Begum Rana Liaquat Ali opposed the Islamization policy and supported Women's action Forum. She founded the *Federation of University Women* and the *Karachi Business and Professional Women's Club*. The *Family Planning Association of Pakistan*, *Girl Guides*, *Housewives Associations*, *Nurses Federation* and *Women's International Club* were also founded. The *Karachi Business and Professional Women's Club* aimed at establishing working women's identity and eliminating discrimination in professional fields.

In 1971, with the creation of Bangladesh, there was a change in the socio-political scene of the country. With the establishment of democracy, there was a transformation which took place within the women's movement. The participation of took place within the women's movement. The participation of the working class grew in considerable numbers in the political process. Increasing numbers of women began to enter professional fields and expressed themselves in the areas of art and literature. There were expectations of a better future as far as the living conditions of the communities were concerned. The people were hopeful about associating with each other beyond cultural and class prejudices. At this point, one should bear in mind that the goal towards which people were striving that is, democracy, was in the interest and benefit of both men and women.<sup>96</sup>

The turning point in the movement was the formation of Women's Action Forum(WAF) in 1981. This was a reaction to the martial law regime of General Zia Prior to 1981, whatever women's rights movements. As such, they were not women-oriented. They demanded social reform, for example, education. This demand was within the existing structural framework of society, they were merely emerged in the broad national movement. The earlier movements did not identify any issues to be dealt with separately. Some of the earlier activists emerged from political parties. They raised women's issues but their focus was on other matters.

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<sup>96</sup> Nighat, op.cit., pp. 131-149

## Women's Economic Activity

In virtually all societies, the gender division of labor associates women with family maintenance. Overwhelmingly, gender segregation and domestic subsistence production have characterized the lives of women in the economic sphere, although before industrialization there was little distinction between the private and public economic spheres as most production took place in the family and in and around the home. In Nubian civilization in ancient Africa, for example, there is evidence that women were involved in the production of pottery for household use, while men specialized in producing wheel-turned pottery for trade. At times there were disincentives for women to be economic actors. In medieval Islamic society, elite urban men were cautioned not to marry women who engaged in economic activities in the public arena. But such observations should not be construed as an indication of lack of importance and variety in women's roles in agriculture, craft and textile production, the tending of livestock, trade, and other areas. In fact, many women engaged in economic activity that not only supplied subsistence but generated wealth, especially in agricultural and trade sectors of the economy.

Article 50 of the Indian constitution made special provisions for the welfare of women. It provides special status and protection.<sup>97</sup> This equates all section of the Indian society including those who belong to the deprived section of society. The directive principle of state policy (Article 39) provides equal pay for equal work irrespective of their sex. Article 243 and Article 243(1) also provides reservation for women in *panchayats* and municipal bodies. Various laws were passed for the protection to safeguard women rights like Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955, Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Hindu Guardianship Act, 1956, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, Sexual Harassment at Work Place Act, 1999 and Domestic Violence Bill, 2001.<sup>98</sup> The UNDP Human Development Report, 1995 points out that 78 percent of the women in the countryside remains engaged in agricultural activities. Table 3 shows the comparative share of burden by women in India.

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<sup>97</sup> D. D. Basu, op.cit., pp 73-138

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Incidentally, the tale of the lives of the urban middleclass working women is also the same as that of these rural women. It is noteworthy that women, one and all, are condemned to a life of serfdom, anonymity, facelessness and oblivious to their own life. The life of drudgery, deprivation, denial, discrimination, disease and anonymity, is the universal fate of the womanhood in the world.

The economic role of women is very important throughout the world and it is an undeniable fact. The only consideration is the level of recognition and the amount of participation in the decision making level. In nearly all of sub-Saharan Africa, women historically played and continue to play important roles in agricultural production.<sup>99</sup> In one of the few areas of sub-Saharan Africa where private property in land pre-dated *European* arrival, among the *Amhara* of Northeast Africa (present-day Ethiopia), women could control the entire agricultural production process. They owned, plowed, planted, and harvested their own fields. Amerindian women were important in agricultural production in Latin America before the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese, who then sought to enlist men as agricultural laborers in cash crops. Although for the early centuries of the Atlantic slave trade the sex ratio was heavily imbalanced toward males, African women performed important agricultural labor, which was essential to the economies of colonial Latin America, the Caribbean, and what would become the United States. Women were cultivators in much of Asia, usually in family-centered production units.<sup>100</sup> Even where women did not cultivate, they often performed other roles associated with agricultural production. For instance, in nineteenth-century Egypt, women did not plow land, but they worked at harvesting and in pest control activities.

Women undertook various kinds of manufacturing activities. In the Chewa-Malawi area of nineteenth-century East Africa, women were involved in producing salt and in other manufacture. In the eleventh-century Pagan Empire in Southeast Asia, women were important in the spinning of yarn and weaving of cloth.<sup>101</sup> In eighteenth - and nineteenth-century Egypt, women were important in the textile crafts, though they were squeezed out by industrialization. In the nineteenth century, partially due to demand created by a European market, women became important to the growth of the silk industry in Lebanon and the carpet industry in Iran. Women were important

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<sup>99</sup> Dwyer, Daisy and Bruce, Judith, ed., *A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World*, Stanford University Press, California, 1988, pp. 1-19 and 99-129.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-127.

<sup>101</sup> Dwyer, Daisy and Bruce, Judith (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 1-12

weavers among the Inka, where they also worked in the mines. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women among the Shona of southern Africa worked in the gold mines.

Table 3

Activity/ Chores	Percentage of Man	Percentage of Woman
Feeding the family	05	95
Ploughing fields	95	05
Animal Husbandry	50	50
Fuel, fodder, and water	10	90
Harvesting	40	60
Agro processing	10	90
Storage	20	80
Transporting	20	80
Weeding	30	70
Sowing/transplanting	50	50
Marketing	70	30
Preparation of field	95	05
<b>Total Workload</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>

Perhaps the most ubiquitous economic activity undertaken by women was that of trading. In Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa, women traded a number of items, including agricultural products, cooked food, cloth, beads, and handicrafts. Although women's trading activities were sometimes on a small scale, often referred to as "petty trading," that was not always the case. In Southeast Asia, women in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Burma were engaged in trade that included the large-scale buying and selling of rice and other commodities.<sup>102</sup> They were also identified with the production and trade of a particular foodstuff, betel leaf, for which they made elaborate jeweled containers. Sometimes women engaged in long-distance trade that required their absence from home for extended periods of time. Among the nineteenth-century Kikuyu of East Africa, women engaged in long-distance trade and retained control over some of the wealth they accumulated. Even where women engaged in local, small-scale trade, they could be very important to the growth and development of long-distance trade and of port towns and urban centers. Such was the case with women traders along the west coast of Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-107

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-18

Residence in a harem and the practice of seclusion placed restraints on women's ability to engage directly in public-arena economic activity, thus forcing them to use intermediaries to conduct their business operations. This use of intermediaries, and the higher economic status that seclusion usually implied, meant women sometimes held considerable wealth and became significant economic actors. In the nineteenth century in parts of the Middle East (notably Cairo, Istanbul, Aleppo, and Nablus), upper-class women employed agents to conduct their business transactions in the public arena. They also invested capital as "silent partners" in other ventures and loaned money to men. Among the Hausa of northern Nigeria, Islamic women who were secluded used prepubescent girls to trade for them in public.

In some places, however, the strict gender segregation of Islamic societies in fact expanded women's economic alternatives, since only women could perform certain services for other women. In nineteenth-century Egypt women of lower economic status served as entertainers, cosmologists, and midwives to women of higher economic status who were in seclusion. Strict gender segregation opened up the professions (medicine, education, etc.) to women in the late twentieth century, especially in countries where economic resources are plentiful, such as Saudi Arabia.

The absence of male heirs, or the fact of widowhood, could also create economic opportunity for women. Under such circumstances women ran businesses and were important in trades. In sixteenth century Mexico, Mencía Pérez, a *mestiza*, married a rich merchant.<sup>104</sup> When he died, she took over the business and became one of the wealthiest merchants in the province. In Syria, the *gedik*, a license that allowed one to practice a trade, was normally inherited by sons from their fathers. In the absence of a male heir, women could inherit the *gedik* and although prevented from practicing the trade, they could sell, rent, or bequeath the license. In coastal West Africa creole women traders descended from African mothers and European fathers served as cultural intermediaries and often became very successful and wealthy businesswomen. Yet women's tremendously varied and important roles in economic activity did not translate into economic, legal, or political equality with men. The more economic autonomy women had, however, the greater their freedoms. Whatever the origins of women's inequality, the complex processes through which it has been perpetuated will not fall in the face of economic parity alone.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-129

## **Role of NGOs in Education and Training**

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in the area of education. To a large extent the NGO activities have been confined to non-formal education sector. Now a new partnership is emerging between the government and the NGOs in the area of basic education as seen in the model of Lok Jumbish, a government sponsored project for primary education in Rajasthan. Various NGOs are participating in the formal education sector, for example, Action Aid, Plan International, Aga Khan Foundation etc.<sup>105</sup> NGO action in primary education emphasizes delivery system of quality education to the marginalized people like, poor women and girls. Programmes of formal and non-formal education are emphasized by the government in collaboration with local NGOs and the communities. The NGOs use the strategy of popular education in spreading knowledge among people. This is seen in people's participation in developing "IEC" (Information, Education and Communication) packages of spreading knowledge about HIV/ AIDS, health promotion, environmental risks, etc. In the popular education, cultural forms of education are used like, drama, music, stories, etc. Popular education is effective in increasing awareness towards various, immunization, girls' education, sexual harassment, etc. Popular education can be applied anywhere, adapting to local context, the ideology and culture of the people within the existing political system. Thus, the NGOs can play a significant role in empowering women through education and training and it is also the basis in the strategy of women's participation in political field.

It is clear that women do play an important role in cultural and economic activities of every society. They are the ambassador of world culture and they are the other side of the same coin in terms of economic activities. No matter of the fact of what they are women are still under the subjugation of male domination. With the recognition of women's share in every society and the recognition of social benefits that can be generated through women's participation the concept of women empowerment emerged. This very concept encouraged development of women as par to that of the male counterpart. Comparatively, women are less participative, and both in quantity and

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<sup>105</sup> A. K. Jain, 'Innovative Initiatives for Development of Rural Women,' Kurukshetra, Vol.51, No.5, March 2003, pp. 20-24

quality they are far behind man. The reason for this fact had been cited in numerous cases before. So, empowering women is the process through which the gap between man and women would narrowed down. And this process could only be fulfilled through education of women and enhancing the economic condition of women. Education is the primary condition of social change. It uplifts the social dignity of individuals and make them understand the wider perspectives of the society. And at the same time, by enhancing economic standard of the individual and by giving economic responsibility a person becomes a better individual.

When we see the case of India and Pakistan, we find that women are still the victims of their conservative cultures. The Hindu and the Islamic culture look upon women as reproductive machines and are considered as lesser human beings. Girls' education is considered less important than that of the boys. Though, they share half of the economic activity of the family, they are not seen when it counts. It is realized that their participation is important, however the core cultural beliefs restrict them to their traditional position. It is very difficult for them to come out of this cultural territory. A non bias and concerted effort towards empowering women is the demand of the hour. Until the cultural paradigm is not fully understood and put a check on it the policies towards the concept of empowerment would remain as it is. It is not material decoration that required in the process, it is the outlook, the cultural mentality that is most required. It can be achieved through proper educational programmes, and by encouraging participative culture among women.



## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

We have discussed the primary problems faced in the process of empowering women in South Asia, precisely India and Pakistan. These primary constraints are almost constituted by cultural or religious practices and beliefs of the society. We have also talked about the material changes taking place in the society with the emergence of urbanization and modernization in the post colonial era. The most significant changes can be identified after the adoption of liberalization. The original track has been changed. Women have come out of their role of *dasini*<sup>106</sup> to an educated modern individual. However, they are still the victims of a very sick outlook created by the age old tradition of the society. Though, women have become parliamentarians, Prime Minister, engineers, doctors, pilots and so on, they are still behind the male counterpart. They do not get the freedom enjoyed by male folk. A woman cannot go alone at late night. She is the target of lust and inhuman nature of man in general. They may be economically quite satisfactory, but they are not getting proper treatment from the society. It is not only against the physical threat from man, they are facing numerous problems in the society, even within the women groups. Their social and political expectations are eroded by these cultural constraints. Women are not the preferred sex in the society.

Empowerment of women signifies increase in women's power to achieve equality with men. Further, empowerment is not just a question of rearrangement of power, both economic and political; it is also a matter of change of values. Women's empowerment perspective is different from women's development perspective. Development perspective is primarily a socio-economic project, while women's empowerment is essentially a political project. Women's development is concerned with the enhancement of women's position in economic space while the women's empowerment is concerned with the improvement of their position in political and social space. The verbal acknowledgement of the importance of women empowerment at national and international level is not serving the purpose. Governments and NGO's have moved towards each other. Professionalization on the NGO's side and state

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<sup>106</sup> the meaning of *dasini* is servant. It is being used in good term. A faithful and obeying wife of the husband.

orientation on the grassroots have brought activities nearer to one another. The modes of expression are identical, but where are women really at the center of development practice? And where are they at the center of development organizations? The promotion of women is still an appendage not only by the slow number of “pure” women’s projects, but also by the subordinated role of women’s interests and measures for women in integrated programmes defined as “cross-sectoral task” the advancement of women is often reduced to the mere addition of a women competent.<sup>107</sup> For example, the form of small-scale loans for sewing machines. The few women’s in the organizations are assigned a low-ranking and sparsely equipped niche.

## India

Government has passed legislation to curb the misuse of amniocentesis techniques (1975) for sex selection and abortion of female fetuses. In 1971 there were 930 females for every 1,000 males.<sup>108</sup> A decade later this figure had increased to 934, but by 2001, instead of continuing to rise, the ratio dropped to 933, lower than the 1971 figure. The sex ratio is one of the lowest in the world.

There is a cultural and religious bias against women. A man cannot attain *moksha* unless he has a son to light his pyre. Even the woman who espouses feminism chooses to abort a female child in her womb. The woman herself has internalized social bias against a female child and in favour of male child. Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act. 1994 that came into force on January 1, 1996 has failed to check aborting of female fetus. The PNDT clinics are flourishing in cities and towns. Mobile clinics are also functional in this field.

A 1976 amendment to child Marriage Restraint Act also raised the minimum legal age for marriage from 15 to 18 for young women and from 18 to 21 for young men. However, in many rural communities, illegal child marriages are still common.<sup>109</sup> In some rural areas, nearly half the girls between 10 and 14 are married. Because there is pressure on women to prove fertility by conceiving as soon as possible after marriage,

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<sup>107</sup> Human Development Report on South Asia (1998), UNDP, New York

<sup>108</sup> Population Census 1991, Government of India Report.

<sup>109</sup> Ram Ahuja, op.cit., pp- 249-51

adolescent marriage is synonymous with adolescent child bearing: roughly 10-15 percent of all births take place to women in their teens.

These laws were enacted to raise the social status of women, which failed to remove social prejudices and social inequalities. However, in India laws are violated with impunity without fear of any deterrent action or social disapproval. We read in the newspapers about dowry deaths, rape, abduction, trafficking of women, sexual harassment at work place and even teasing in buses and streets. Pattern of crime rates of 1999 over 1998 shows a slight drop in dowry deaths from 6975 to 6696, but much of these cases go unreported (NCRB 1998-99).<sup>110</sup> Half the number of women in India is killed in their bedrooms or one woman is killed every 102 minutes in the name of dowry. In India, 6,000 dowry murders are committed each year. This really exists even though the Dowry Prohibition Act has been in existence for 41 years, and there are virtually no arrest was made under the Act.

In the recent years there has been an alarming rise in atrocities against women in India. On an average there are more than 15000 rapes every year in India.<sup>111</sup> National Crime Research Bureau figures indicate that the incidence of rape has increased from 15,330 in 1997 to 16,496 in 2000. The data reveals that 20 per cent were mostly in the age group of 16 to 25 years and 10 per cent were minor girls below 15 years of age. A study conducted among men and women in Jullandhar district, Punjab in north India reports that about 75 percent of women reported being beaten frequently by their husbands; and likewise about 75 per cent men reported beating their wives (Jahan 1994).

### *Women's Development Perspective*

The beginning of 1970's show the emergence of intellectual discourse on gender inequalities with the appearance of Boserup's work which brought to the fore the 'gender gaps' in the distribution of work, resources and benefits which are largely appropriated by men. Although there have been various shifts in the policy approaches in the last fifty years from the concept of 'welfare' existed till 70s to 'development' in

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<sup>110</sup> Pramod Mishra, *Womwn in South Asia: Dowry Deaths and Human Rights Violations.* Authors Press, Delhi, 2000, pp. 189-226

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-26.

80s and to 'empowerment' in 90s. The Lok Sabha constituted a committee on "Empowerment of Women" in March 1997. The National Commission for Women was constituted as a national apex body in 1992 to project and safeguard the rights of women. Employment and income generation program was also commenced in 1982-83 to trained women belong to weaker sections of society and provide them employment on sustainable basis.<sup>112</sup>

This scheme was initiated for social and economic empowerment of women. Yet it has failed largely to improve the status of women. No many women headed enterprises in the countryside. The India's constitution guarantees for free primary education to both boys and girls up to age 14. But primary education in India is not universal, though this goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed. Among the world's 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men two to one. Girls constitute the majority of 130 million children without access to primary education. (Human Development Report 1995). The literacy rate of women is 39.42 percent as against 63.89 percent for men. They can be seen as beggars on road crossing and rag pickers. As per statistics available there are more than 17 lakh female domestic workers as against 7 lakh male domestic workers in the country.

There is a consensus that higher female mortality between ages one and five and high maternal mortality rates result in the deficit of females in the population. It was estimated in 1990 that deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by over 300,000 each year, and every sixth infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination. Of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25 percent will not live to see their fifteenth birthday.<sup>113</sup>

Another important critique of women's development perspective pointed to its neglect of power dimensions. Development has marginalized women in other developing nations too, which nonetheless continue to exhibit gender-balanced demographic measures. The fact that economic development devalues women is alone not sufficient to make families discriminate against women. It is pointed out that both economic and cultural factors are jointly responsible for the variations in the status of women (Kishwar: 1990). It was also contended that women's development perspective remained steeped primarily in economic concerns, to neglect of power dimensions of

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<sup>112</sup> Pramod Mishra, *op.cit.*, pp. 108-120 and 138-165.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-98.

gender relations. Mere improvement of economic lot of women is not likely to bring them at par with men. The key factor, therefore, is her say in the decision-making process, her participation in domestic as well as community power structure.

### *Women's Empowerment Perspective*

The term empowerment pre-supposes primacy of power over other dimensions. We speak of women's sharing of political power and participation in government. An important issue related to women's empowerment is the reservation of seats for them in the state legislature and Union Parliament, which is far from realized. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 has provided 33 percent seats for women in panchayats and municipal bodies.<sup>114</sup>

Through the experiences of the Indian Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI), one million women have actively entered political life in India.<sup>115</sup> The creation of the quota system has created a space for local women – but the vast majority of them are illiterate and poor. They occupy as much as 43 percent of seats, spurring the election of increasing numbers of women at the district, and provincial and national levels. Since the onset of PRI, the percentages of women in various levels of political activity have risen from 4-5 percent to 25-40 percent.

Women's entry into local government in such large numbers, often more than the required 33 percent, and their success in campaigning, including the defeat of male candidates, has shattered the myth that women are not interested in politics, and have no time to go to meetings or to undertake all the other work that is required in political party processes. Seats in local bodies have been reserved for women for their active participation in decision-making, but the parliament has so far failed to provide a similar representation to women. Ugly scenes were witnessed over tabling the women's reservation bill that has brought the grim truth into sharper focus that Indian society continues to be male dominated and male hegemony is still the dominant reality. In India, the participation of women in politics has actually been declined since the days of freedom movement (10 percent). It reached a high of 8 percent in 1984 elections. This figure has not crossed since then.

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<sup>114</sup> Hemlatha H. M., op.cit., pp. 9-15

<sup>115</sup> Susheela Kaushik, op.cit., pp. I-XIX

Like India, most countries in the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in the political life. Women are moving in the direction of near equal participation in only a handful of countries, such as Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. However, in all other countries, including the advanced democratic Western European countries and North America, where women exercise certain freedom and have acquired the wherewithal for economic independence, female presence in legislatures remains small and relatively insignificant. Women are virtually excluded from political power all over the world. Although women constitute half of the population, only 3.5 percent of the world's cabinet ministers are women, and women hold no ministerial positions in 93 countries.<sup>116</sup>

The measures taken for women's empowerment in India clearly shows that there is deep concern in the country to uplift their social and economic conditions only, so that they may play an active role in the task of national development. Government is not serious for the political participation of women; as the data shows that they are lagging behind in political sphere.

## **Pakistan**

Conscious of the important role that women can play in the life of a nation, Begum Liaquat Ali Khan founded the All Pakistan Women's Association in 1949. It is by far the most popular and active organization of women in Pakistan and has branches all over the country under the dynamic leadership of Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, and inspired by the lofty aims of regeneration of Pakistani women, many a social worker came out to serve the uprooted women and children at a very critical time in the nation's life.

The fundamental aim of the association is the educational, cultural, social and economic welfare of the Pakistani women. In an attempt to achieve these goals it tries to enlist the intelligent participation of women in the growth and development of their country.

The activities of APWA have been directed to the achievement of the above mentioned aims and objectives with special emphasis on economic rehabilitation of refugee

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<sup>116</sup> Nighat Said Khan, 'Introducing the Women's Studies Conference,' in Nighat Said Khan and others (eds.) *A Celebration of Women*, ASR Publications, Lahore, 1995, pp. 1-5

women, the preservations of women's rights and the social and moral upliftment of the women in Pakistan. The organization argue that with social injustices and irregularities, it is not to grab undue rights and privileges for ourselves, but social injustice militate against national strength by depriving women of the incentives to a full and proper exercise of their freedom. The forces of traditions have retarded the educational progress of Muslim girls. The schools and educational establishments of the country cannot cope up with the ever increasing population of the country. So long as the educational facilities of the backward women are not provided the nation as a whole cannot make any positive progress. Women should be taught about domestic sciences, hygienic medicines, child care, first aid and nursing from the very beginning of their academic career. It has been suggested that the subject or the syllabus of the of education of the girl child should be different from that of the boys. APWA became the lone hardcore voluntary, non-governmental organization of Pakistan. In 1950, nine primary schools were set up in various refugee colonies of Karachi. Various other institutions like secondary schools, college of science and arts were also established. The APWA also actively promoted recreational programmes in the field of art, literature, and music. It also links with the U.N.O. The APWA is the apex and pioneer non- governmental voluntary organization of Pakistan.

The process of political development in Pakistan had always undermined the process of women upliftment. The international trend in the area of women empowerment have gain its weight. There has been popular demand in the international forum to give better attention to those more gender sensitive regions of the world. Pakistan being the pioneer Muslim country in the world cannot be easily left out. The international amnesty report has been focusing on the crime records against women in all the parts of the world. Pakistan is one of the important gender sensitive country in the world. Her crime records against women is very high in comparison to other countries. The gender approach has made the yawning gap between rhetoric and practice even bigger. It might be useful as an instrument of analysis, if it is not debased to a technocratic checklist. But no-one at present knows for sure how it can be implemented. The international trend is to implement promotion of women less in "pure" women's projects than to integrate it in other activities. Parallel to that, there are sings of a trend in which the women's or gender sections of development agencies are being disbanded and integrated in country or specialist sections. Currently, however, there is apparently still a lack of concepts of women. If integration, or "mainstreaming" now takes place at the various levels, it is to be feared that the promotion of women will

peter out rather than spread.

At the same time, disenchantment prevails among those who have understood that the advancement of women is a means to more rights and opportunities in life, more self-confidence and social recognition. The demand to effect structural change through projects founders on the general conditions. Like development assistance as a whole, raising conditions. Like development assistance as a whole raising the status women's is also in many regions becoming increasingly merely disaster relief and survival aid. All involved have long known there are no universally applicable formulates or projects, and still fewer handy "directions for use" for getting out of poverty and blasting open patriarchal suppression.<sup>117</sup>

The dilemma is clear. The economic crisis, the over indebted and socially inactive governments, and the men who steal away from responsibilities are adding women with ever increasingly burdens in securing survival. Thereby the women urgently need support. At the same time, limited impacts of promotional measures, or even their boomerang effect, are becoming more obvious.

Many women are being catapulted into the exploitation mechanism of the market and money economy only when they get involved in project. Or, at least, the project are speeding that process. Because of the projects the women neglect subsistence production and their traditional principals of the moral economy. But it is clear that as a result of training programmes, new forms of organization, development of new fields of action, and mobility, women's self-confidence and partly also their power to negotiate vis-à-vis men is growing without promotion by projects, the activities of many women's groups in the South world collapse. But there's no way around it; the advancement of women must continue to seek bridges between being content with little and the vision of a development that is more just to women.

### **Role of Voluntary Organizations: Case Study Of India**

The Scheme of Welfare extensions Projects started in 1951. They provided basic minimum services to women and children, comprising *balwadis*, maternity and health services, literacy and social education for women. Arts and craft centers, recreational

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.



facilities in rural areas were handed over to voluntary organizations known as *Mahila Mandal* in 1961.<sup>118</sup> The social welfare board bears the expenditure up to 75 percent; the remaining rose by the *Mahila Mandals* or by the voluntary organizations.

Balika Samridhi Yojana, 1997 also made an important contribution to voluntary organizations. The objective of this scheme was to change the community's attitude towards the girl child. Other important voluntary organisations working in the field of women's emancipation are Indian Council for Women Welfare, Indian Council of Social Welfare, National Federation of Indian Women, Human Rights Organization, Kasturba Gandhi Trust, Kamla Nehru Memorial Trust, Indira Gandhi Trust, All India Women's Conference, Bhartiya Gramin Mahila Sangh, Young Women's Christian Association, Bharat Sevak Samaj, Indian Red Cross, Lions club. And a number of religious organizations like Rama Krishna Mission and Arya Smaj working towards the same objective.<sup>119</sup>

- “Adihi,” a Patna based Non-Governmental Organization is working for the development of rural women. This organization is working on the problems of female infanticide, foeticide, and excess female child mortality due to sex selective negligence.
- “Saheli”, a Delhi based women's organization said that wife beating is common in all social classes as “it is a reflection of power relationship between a husband and wife”, which mirrors women's secondary social status (Saheli 1988) and acute female powerlessness in India.
- “Maadhyam” is a help line that provides counseling and legal advice to people who face sexual harassment at their workplace.
- “Samarthya” is an informal group of differently abled people – who prove that they can travel anywhere and everywhere.
- Thimmakka Environmental Education seeks to educate and inform people of the connection between excessive and ecologically damaging consumption and its effects on our health and environment.

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<sup>118</sup> see annual reports on the performance of NGOs in India, UNDP, New Delhi, 2003.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

- “Sakshi”, a violence intervention centre, counsels women who are victims of physical or mental abuse, provides training methodology for addressing violence and conducts legal research on women’s rights.
- “Goonj”, is an organisation whose mission is to help the underprivileged people. They collect and distribute old clothes, utensils, stationery, newspapers to people living in slums, on pavements and roadsides.
- Cross Cultural Solutions – “Grass root solutions, global impact”, is their motto. They aim to bring people of different cultures and economic backgrounds together through the world of work.

Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM), Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women for credit and thrift activities have proliferated in some districts of Maharashtra. Between 1995 and 2001, MAVIM has formed SHGs in 86 villages. There are now 449 SHGs with a membership of 8130.<sup>120</sup> SHGs were formed to help women belonging to families below the poverty line. Economic transactions apart, the periodical meetings of women in these villages become the channel for their mobilization. The participation of these women in economic programmes is conducive for group solidarity, which might culminate in mobilization and political action. Agarwal (1995) terms this as ‘by-product’ of participation of women and Carr (1996) succinctly express this in the dictum ‘economic is political’. Both these enunciations suggest the fact that participation of women in economic activities leads to these groups in political action.

But women’s movement has given little space for women’s participation in electoral politics until relatively recently. The movement is yet to evolve a coherent position or a coordinated strategy on this issue, but there have been a few isolated regional initiatives in this area. Some groups, including the National Commission of Women had earlier called for reservation of seats for women, a few women’s groups like the Bangalore-based voluntary organization called ‘Vimochana’ campaigned against politicians in the 1989 general elections. And many women’s groups in various cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore prepared manifestos in the eighties during the elections. More than 8,00,000 women’s groups and non-government organizations (NGOs) are currently engaged in reaching, documenting and training women to enter electoral politics.

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<sup>120</sup> T. Chiranjeevulu, op.cit., pp. 16-19.

For purpose of women's empowerment, multidimensional approach holds greater promise. Empowerment has several other dimensions like social empowerment, economic empowerment, besides, of course political empowerment. Social empowerment implies promotion of social capabilities such as education, health, cultural aspects and women's honour. Economic empowerment implies entitlement to employment, income, property, productive resources and benefits of development irrespective of gender differences. Political empowerment, of course, implies equal role in decision-making process in the power structure from grass root (local) level to national level. Political participation has a relation with some psychological elements such as confidence building, acquisition of a sense of efficacy and ability to overcome feeling of happiness. All these dimensions of empowerment are inter-related with each other. In fact, such a broad base of empowerment is needed for women, but it has lost in notion of power structure. The analysis of the political participation of women at the levels of exercise and acquisition of power, show that there is a disparity between the formal idea of women's political participation and their meaningful use of power.<sup>121</sup>

A number of Parliamentary Acts have been enacted to provide for empowerment of women, including constitutional amendments. But these legislations are not effective to curb the social evil like dowry deaths in society. Not surprisingly, much of the social legislation enacted for women's empowerment has produced little effect. Merely reforming legal procedure and passing of laws will not solve the problem. What is required is the orientation towards changing the attitudes of persons connected with law, and the principles of social justice.

Thus, the non-governmental organizations committed to gender equality should take the lead role for the upliftment of women and their active participation in political sphere. *Mahila Mandals* are the potential political space for mobilization on gender line (Das 2000). Study and research on economic participation of women yield a satisfactory theoretical model that economic empowerment of women does lead to improvement in their position in the domestic power structure. In political empowerment, 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments providing of 33 percent reservation for women in all the three tier system of *panchayat* have set in motion a silent revolution in the country

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<sup>121</sup> Aparna Mahanta. 'Women's Movement: Perspectives and Strategies,' in Susheela Kaushik (ed.) *Women's Participation in Politics*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1997, pp. 113-125.

toward promoting women's empowerment.<sup>122</sup> What is needed is a multi-dimensional strategy rather than a single-track strategy.

### **Concept of Empowerment Evaluation**

Evaluation of the process of empowerment is the basis of empowering women and community development. Empowerment evaluation reflects the process of participatory communication. SHG formation, popular education and political participation are all based on the process of participatory communication.<sup>123</sup> Empowerment evaluation as a capacity building process is based on the principles of participatory inquiry, research and evaluation. Its objective is to highlight community members' own knowledge and to empower them. This can be attained by participating the women in each stage of programme development that is, need assessment, programme objectives, implementation monitoring and evaluation. Empowerment evaluation would promote self-determination and community control. The traditional evaluation is done by the professional experts, usually for funding of the organization. It is closed decision making process and community participation is limited to providing feedback. In the empowerment or participatory evaluation, there is shared responsibility and decision making power lies with the participants. Evaluation is done by the participants to document, develop and improve the programmes. In the empowerment evaluation, participants not only are involved but also control the process.

Despite its focus on self-determination and collaboration, empowerment evaluation and traditional external evaluation are not mutually exclusive. In fact the empowerment evaluation process produces a rich data source that enables a more complete external examination. Self-determination defined as the ability to decide one's own course in life, forms the basis of empowerment evaluation. It consists of numerous interconnected capabilities, such as the ability to identify and express needs, establish goals or expectations and a plan of action to achieve them, identify resources, make rational choices from various alternatives, take appropriate steps to pursue the objectives and evaluate the results. A breakdown at any function of this network of capabilities because of various factors can reduce the chances of self-determination. Women face resistance because of traditional social structures, norms and values. NGOs can facilitate the

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<sup>122</sup> Rohini Gawankar, *Role of Women in Panchayati Raj*, in Susheela Kaushik, op.cit., pp. 88-100.

<sup>123</sup> T. Chiranjeevulu, op.cit., pp. 16-19.

process by training the people. Training, facilitation, advocacy and liberation are the facets of empowerment. Liberation means being freed or freeing oneself from pre-existing roles and constraints. It often involves new conceptualizations of oneself and others. Empowerment evaluation can also be liberating, as women liberate them from traditional expectations and roles, 'find new opportunities, perceive existing resources in a new light, and redefine their identities and future roles, find new opportunities, perceive existing resources in a new light, and redefine their identities and future roles. Empowerment evaluation is a long term process resulting in improvement of quality of life of community with support from development agencies.

Thus, empowerment evaluation is a significant strategy of participatory development. This strategy is not independent of other strategies like formation of self help groups, education and training, and political participation.

Empowerment of women is a long term goal which can be supported by non-government organizations by setting step by step approaches. The aim and purpose of non-government organizations should not only be just is not just' providing relief and welfare but involving the people like, the poor women in the community development of sustainable systems. NGOs need to become more professional, have self-critical learning and spread new approaches. Participatory Learning Appraisal (PLA) methods are effective in enhancing the participatory communication.<sup>124</sup> NGOs can develop and spread these participatory methods for empowering the women. NGOs can have wider impact if their activities are expanded in various stages, setting the objectives based on people's needs, achieving these objectives, changing to participatory communication and teaching the people to manage their own affairs. Through these activities, an NGO develops itself by reducing the protective and nurturing role and emphasizing on self-reliance by the people. Thus, NGOs have to learn the interaction mode of participation constituting of animation, facilitation and progressive redundancy. Animation refers to the process of interaction whereby the development agent, the animator, assists the people to make their own decisions, analysis and actions, thus building up their self-reliance. Facilitation means assisting people in practical skills, improving their access to resources. As a facilitator, the development agent plays a protective and nurturing role. Finally, there is progressive redundancy that is gradual reduction is the need for external animation and facilitation and women would learn to manage on their own, achieving

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<sup>124</sup> UNDP Report, New Delhi, October-November 2003.

complete self-reliance.

Non-Governmental Organizations NGO need to increase critical awareness about their own functioning by working with other NGOs and forming networks, and coordinating with the government. There is a need for decentralized, informal organizational forms, networks and women's collectives, mobilizing resources for poor women and facilitating their participation in community development. The networks of the organization and collectivities, protecting their autonomy are found to be more sustainable.

Thus, NGOs need to be accountable and transparent in their functioning. NGOs need to have the capabilities and resources to manage sustainable community development programmes. Mobilization of poor women for savings groups, training of group leaders, assessing the needs of the women can be effectively done by participatory communication. Programme evaluation by the women themselves at each stage of implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation would empower the women. Empowerment of women is a long process. NGOs have made a significant impact in many parts of our country in spreading this movement. Effectiveness of NGOs would increase by forming partnerships with the women as well as collaborating with the government.

### **Conclusion:**

The turning point of the initiative towards empowering women is the participation of women themselves in mass. It has been realized that material decoration is the mission of the pure objective of the process of empowerment. Empowerment in the real sense identify that the social, political, economy, and cultural dignity of man and women should be treated equally in every possible aspects. So, development concept of women empowerment do not satisfy the overall nature or objective of pure empowerment. The attachment of culture, religion and the social beliefs towards it has been the constant obstacles. In this line of argument, a drive against the cultural outlook towards women is very important. The ill doings of traditions towards gender relation cannot be redone plainly. It is possible only when proper education is provided to the backward women, make them aware of their ownelves, tell them the truth about being human being and the importance of equality of status. We cannot live with the old traditions, things

changes according to time, space and requirements. The participations of the universal women in the process is vital. They are the target and they are the ones to take proper participative responsibility. It is in them to realize the objective. The concern authorities must also give a concerted efforts towards the project. It is the most important force that the people of all the countries should keep in mind. It is not possible to clap with one hand. Proper scrutiny of the process and programmes of the NGOs and the policies of the government is required in the process of women empowerment. It will keep proper account of the evaluation of the process. And the report of this evaluation will be the focus of the next agenda towards the process of women empowerment. The undone things of the prior leaders are pressing the more today, it should be the sole and lone mission in the making of just world; else the world will remain as the platform of tyranny as before.

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