

**PLANNING FOR WOMEN:  
The Discourse of the Indian State**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**PLANNING FOR WOMEN: The Discourse of the Indian State**", submitted by **Pooja Satyogi** is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**. It is her original work and may be placed before examiners for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree to this university or any other university.

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## INTRODUCTION

'The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres.'<sup>1</sup>

Much of the writings on the status of women in the post – independence period, government and non-government both, seem to follow a convention. They all begin by mentioning the principle of sex equality laid down in the Constitution. I, too, will follow this convention. The Government of India declared the year 2001 as the Year of Empowerment of Women and released a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. This policy is the first ever-national level policy document for women, the Indian State has come out with since independence. It is not a mere coincidence that this comes at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the policy was released four years after the idea of such a policy was envisaged by the Indian State. What is so empowering about this policy? Wasn't empowerment, of some kind or the other, always an ideal the State had been trying to achieve? How has the State theorized and operationalised empowerment? Does the State have a theoretical understanding of the specificity of problems women encounter on account of sex discrimination and their multiple locations? What informs this understanding? What is the time

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, 2001, *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, p. 1

period that the State has set out to achieve possible empowerment of women? Why did the State wait for the turn of the century to think more specifically about empowering women? Is it just rhetoric of sorts, with a clever variation only in language?

Why I think it is important to ask these seemingly elementary questions is because the Indian State has chosen to take the turn of the century as some sort of bench mark for all that it has achieved since independence and all that it still seeks to achieve. This also explains the various "21 Century – Looking Ahead Programmes" of the State. Before it does some *looking ahead*, it is important to look back and see how well the job of ameliorating discrimination against women and achieving equality for them has been performed. If this is the time for the State to look ahead in certain ways to achieve its ideals, then I choose the same time to look back at how it understood the *women's question* in the little over half a century gone by. Mine is a purely theoretical exercise of examining some government documents that have sought to articulate issues concerning women.

The guarantee of equality between sexes by the Indian Constitution becomes a landmark because it shows that there is recognition on the State's part that inequality between sexes *exists* and it is binding on the State to take appropriate measures to move towards an egalitarian society. How it seeks to interpret inequality and what steps it takes to rectify the situation can well be understood from the various policy and plan documents of the State. In its literature, the State has experimented with

constructs of “Women” and “Gender”, “Women and Development” and “Women in Development”, “ Women’s Empowerment” and “Gender Equity”, “Women’s Welfare and Women’s Advancement”, etc. These approaches are not arranged in any sequence in more than half a century of planning. For instance, the dominant approach towards planning for women has really been oriented towards welfarism, though at the same time there have been proclamations a change in policy orientations. The purpose of this dissertation is to map the changes in the theoretical orientation of the Indian State towards its Women citizens by analyzing plan documents and policies that deal concerns of women. Dissertation is divided into four main chapters followed by a conclusion.

The first chapter, ‘Welfare Plans for Women: 1951-74’ attempts to analyse the period immediately after independence up to the early seventies. The approach of the Indian State towards its women citizens was largely geared towards securing welfare measure for them. The active role of women in the processes of nation building was marginal and they were not looked up to as productive economic beings. The three areas that the State identified as relevant for women were education, health and social welfare. The emphasis on each one of these was to make sure that women became efficient home managers and performed their *natural* duties of child bearing and rearing to their full capacity.

The Second chapter, ‘Programs for Development of Women: 1975-90’ documents changes in the stance of the State from a largely welfarist

makeup to a seeing women as persons who contribute to the economy as productive beings. There was growing realization that the welfare policies had not helped ameliorate the situation of women. Further, it was realized that processes of development had to take gender dynamic into account since they affect men and women differently. There was recognition of the fact that women's concerns had implications for economic development. The Indian State in the seventies launched a number of poverty alleviation programmes which also targeted women. There were attempts to increase employment opportunities for women and to 'integrate' them into the development process. But the limitations of this approach were to soon become apparent. This approach could only have achieved limited targets because it was not an approach that attempted to radically change women's unequal position in society. It merely sought to make create a few programs for women as part of the mainstream developmental processes and left the question of any structural changes and reforms in society intact. In the mid Eighties, the gaps in this approach were also becoming apparent and there was again a shift in the State's approach towards 'Empowerment' of women which was to be a holistic development of women.

The Third chapter, Gearing Up for Women's Empowerment: The Decade of the Nineties' looks at the articulation of the goal of empowering women more closely. The dominant understanding in this paradigm has been that full development of women is possible if they are economically independent, are educated, are self confident, if their capacities are



optimally realized and if societal attitudes that discriminate against them change. Out of these, the single most important factor is singled out as the economic independence of women. It is quite surprising that operationalising this goal has been far from adequate in the Indian context. In other words, the State has not attempted reform in labour laws, the property laws discriminate against women, and bulk of the women are concentrated in the unorganized sector which is highly discriminatory in nature. Education of women has suffered tremendously in India and even after half a century of a plethora of education policies, the ideal of universal education at the primary school level remains a distant reality.

The turn of the new century sees a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in place all it really does is that it shifts the targets of earlier goals by another ten years. This is not to say that this policy does not have anything new to say about women's concerns, but just that the actual working of the policies on ground always give away the State's rhetoric on many a issue. The fourth chapter, 'National Policy for the Empowerment of Women: Rhetoric vs. Reality' tries to examine this dynamic and attempts to highlight the gaps between policy proposals and their working on the ground with the help of 11 Reports laid in the Parliament by the Committee on the Empowerment of Women.

Overall then, the purpose of this dissertation is to attempt an analysis of some 50 years of planning for Indian women by the Indian State and study paradigm shifts in its stance. I think it is important to make such an

intervention because despite the apparent shifts in the position of the State on women's issues, and continued focus on some areas, the State has not quite achieved success. For instance, a large section of the Indian women continue to be poor, illiterate and unhealthy. If these areas were areas that the State has forever concentrated on, then what went wrong?

## CHAPTER ONE

### Welfare Plans for Indian Women: 1951-74

The First Five Year Plan of the Indian State laid out the multifarious and the wide ranging developmental and related policies and plans that the State was to implement on its way to the nation building process. The strategy of development focused on 'Centralised Planning' and involved massive investment of financial and physical resources. The defining target of the State was to achieve a level of economic growth that would make India self sufficient in food, a strong industrial base in the public sector, critical infrastructure, and generation of employment opportunities. These growth processes and indicators, it was hoped, would substantially improve the quality of life of people. Further, it was realized that the State would also have to invest in achieving social goals and be responsible towards a pursuit of social justice, especially for those who were rather distant from its reach. The State took upon itself the responsibility to protect those who could not immediately benefit from the processes of growth. In other words, the process of planning had to be geared towards securing welfare, protection and rehabilitation for some sections of the population identified in need of such measures. Hence, 'social welfare' planning and administration, and a simultaneous impetus on economic growth were the objectives of the planning process.

The development planning identified 'social welfare services' as appropriate and effective interventions to deal with problems confronting certain specified target groups. These marginalized groups of citizens were categorized broadly as *socially underprivileged, socially maladjusted, physically and mentally handicapped, economically underprivileged and women and children*. While all women and children were recognised as a constituency in need of social welfare, certain women with special 'liabilities' such as widows, women with 'illegitimate' children, unmarried mothers, women in 'moral danger', *sexually vulnerable women*, prostitutes, destitute women, etc. were considered to be more deserving, so to say, of State protection. It was understood that special programmes, services, institutions and safeguards were required to be put in place for these women and children. This was to be the guiding approach of the Indian State towards development in its first four Five Year Plans.

The principal aim of this chapter is to examine specific gender implications that arise out of such an understanding and approach towards women. The focus of this chapter is on the first four Five Year Plans, and each comprises a different section. The concluding section, i.e., the fifth section looks at criticisms leveled against this approach to development by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) that released the 'Towards Equality' Report in 1974. The CSWI Report was the first comprehensive document that attempted a detailed study of the condition of women in India and articulated concerns for women.

## Part One

### *First Five Year Plan 1951- 56*

The First Five Year Plan of the Indian State emphasized that

'... the central objective of planning in India at the present stage is to initiate a process of development which will raise living standards and open out to the people new opportunities for a richer and more varied life... economic planning has to be viewed as an integral part of a wider process aiming not merely at the development of resources in a narrow, technical sense, but at the development of human faculties and the building up of an institutional framework adequate to the needs and aspirations of the people... for development to proceed further, a re-adaptation of social institution and social relationships thus becomes necessary.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, the Plan contended that

'[T]o the extent that the accent of the plan is on increasing production, the limitation of resources available would restrict the scope for expanding social services. And yet, it is obvious that no plan can succeed unless it 'invests' in the improvement of the human material. *Even from the point of view of increasing production, social services like education, technical training and health bring in significant returns. Considerable advances in these can be made if the necessary urge to improvement (sic) is created among the people'*<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine).

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, *First Five Year Plan 1951 – 56*, Chapter 1- The Problem of Development, Planning Commission, p.7

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9-10

Women were identified as a category of people for whom social services were desirable and the State took upon itself the responsibility of sponsoring these social services. The welfare state discourse of the Indian State laid emphasis on health, education and welfare of women in its first five-year plan.

In the area of Health, it is Maternity and Child Health (MCH) care that receives paramount importance. The Plan does not address the general condition of women's health in the country. In other words, social services of the State for women's health did not go beyond the health of the expectant mother. The Plan affirmed that 'the protection of the health of the expectant mother and her child is of the utmost importance for building a sound and healthy nation.'<sup>3</sup>

Education of women is dealt with in the chapter on Education. The Plan laid great emphasis on the role of education 'in the planned development of a nation'.<sup>4</sup> It stressed that 'in a democratic set up, the role of education becomes crucial, since it can function effectively only if there is an intelligent participation of masses in the affairs of the country'.<sup>5</sup> While making an assessment of the levels of education in the country, the plan also indicated that women's education had faced neglect. In the specific section on women's education, it points out that while 'the general purpose and objective of women's education cannot be different from the purpose and objective of men's education, there are vital

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 509, Chapter 31- Health

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 525, Chapter 33- Education

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

differences in the way in which this purpose has to be realized'.<sup>6</sup> The *difference* that is stressed is the sphere of life in which women apparently have a distinctive role and in which they make a special contribution, i.e., *management of household, child rearing, social service, nursing and midwifery, teaching, especially in elementary schools, crafts like knitting and embroidery*. The Plan mentions in so many words that women, *by instinct*, have an aptitude for such activities (emphasis mine).<sup>7</sup> There is something called social education for women mentioned in the plan, but this aspect of education is not elaborated upon. As far as the content of women's education is concerned, it is suggested that 'women should learn everything which will enable them to discharge those functions which *legitimately* belong to their special sphere of life, and by this is meant that a *large majority of them will become mothers and have to bring up their children and manage their house hold in an economical and efficient manner*' (emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup> Further, it is emphasized that vocational opportunities ought to be created for women in cottage industries to the extent that there should be co-ordination between planning for women's education and planning for cottage industries. In other words, the onus was on creating self-employment opportunities for women.

In the section on Social Welfare, the stress was on promotion of women's welfare so they could fulfill their legitimate role in the family and the community. Besides this, it was suggested that help of voluntary organizations be sought in organizing

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 557

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 558

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

women in groups such as 'mothers clubs or unions'. Interestingly, the plan also makes a particular mention of the problem of trafficking of women and children. However, despite the fact that the Constitution prohibits trafficking in human beings, the suggested measures for dealing with the problem did not say that the State would work on the eradication of the problem and severely penalize those found guilty. Instead, it focuses attention only on vigilance associations for prevention of traffic in women.<sup>9</sup> While education and health were the responsibility of the State, there was no national structure or institutional framework or delivery mechanism that could provide welfare services to women. The setting up of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1953 and the launching of the Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1952 were the most significant institutional development during the First Plan. CSWB was aimed at stimulating voluntary effort in women and child welfare and the CDP aimed at a decentralized development and social change in rural areas through community participation, cooperation and leadership.

The First Plan of the post- independence Indian State recognized women as a special category of persons for whom special policies and measures would have to be enacted. However, the document failed to display any clear theoretical understanding of inequality arising out of gender oppression. The focus of the Plan was not on intervention in societal norms and correction of imbalances so that women could be equal citizens. Instead, the idea was to enable them better discharge their housewifely duties. One would have expected that in the First

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 622-23



Plan, the education policy would come out with something radical for bringing about a change in society, but it actually ended up affirming women's unequal status when it declares certain areas as legitimate areas of women only. Similarly, the singular emphasis only on the health of Mother and Child and its almost logical connection with the building of a sound healthy nation also displays ignorance on the part of the State of women's situation. All other categories of women except mothers are excluded from the purview of State's welfare measures. In other words, health of women other than expectant mothers was of no significant consequence, at least in the First Five-Year Plan.

The central objective of the First plan was to stress on human faculties and on a re-adaptation of social institutions and social relationships. However, as regards women citizens, the planners ended up holding the same stereotypes, same social relationships that hamper not just the development of a human faculties, but are also detrimental to the making of a sound nation state.

## **PART TWO**

### ***Second Five-Year Plan 1956-61***

The Second Plan aimed to carry forward the goals set forth in the First Plan, i.e., increase in production, investment and employment. The main program, however, was to move towards a 'socialist pattern of society' that meant 'a better

intellectual and cultural life'.<sup>10</sup> Among other things, this also meant the 'benefits of economic development must accrue more and more to the relatively less privileged classes of society, and there should be a progressive reduction of the concentration of incomes, wealth and economic power'.<sup>11</sup>

Looking specifically in places where the plan deals with women, one observes that the areas primarily remain the same as the first plan, i.e., education, health and social welfare services. In the chapter on education, the planners uphold the goal of girls' education of utmost importance. The State's analysis contended that 'public opinion in every part of the country is not equally alive to the importance of women's education. Special efforts at educating parents combined with efforts to make education more closely related to the needs of girls, are needed...A major obstacle in the way of promoting girls education is the dearth of women teachers.'<sup>12</sup>

Further, it was recognized that at the secondary stage, education of girls suffered and to give a boost to girl's education, the Plan recommended expansion of career opportunities for women to become gram sevikas, nurses, health visitors, teachers, etc.<sup>13</sup> During the Second Plan period, a National Committee on Women's Education was also set up. The Education Panel of the Planning Commission in 1957 had suggested that a 'suitable committee should

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<sup>10</sup> Government of India, *Second five Year Plan 1956-61*, Chapter 2 – Approach to the Second Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, p. 21

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 23- Education, P. 504

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 511

be appointed to go into the various aspects of the question relating to the nature of education for girls at the elementary, secondary and adult stages and to examine whether the present system was helping them to lead a *happier and more useful life*<sup>14</sup> (emphasis mine).

While examining basic approaches and fundamental considerations to the problem of women's education, the Committee reasoned that 'because education is the birth- right of an individual, it automatically becomes the birth- right of a woman as much as of a man'.<sup>15</sup> However, in the next point, the Report while examining the role of women as members of society, suggested that while the *primary role of woman lies within the home*, it is perfectly okay if she steps out of the house so long as her stepping out does not impact on her family life. While articulating qualities that go into the making of an ideal mother, the Committee Report underscored

'...not , in our opinion, she who hugs the child to her bosom all the time and fondles it, not even she who only looks to the physical comfort and care of the child. Only she is a *really good mother who can help the child in developing its full and many –sided personality, in inculcating in it right attitudes of life and habits and giving it a real training for life...*it is in the interest of a better discharge of the duties and responsibilities of motherhood itself that the role of woman should not lie only or even primarily within the home'<sup>16</sup> (emphasis in the original).

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<sup>14</sup> cited in the Introduction: Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, May 1958 to Jan 1959, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1959, Government of India Press

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 2, Basic Approaches and Fundamental Considerations, p. 5

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*; pp. 7-8

Further, while outlining women's contribution to family income, it is seemingly clarified that

'arguments favoring the participation of women in wider life outside the home should also not be taken to mean either that we want every woman to take a job or that without taking up a job, participation in wider life is not possible. Realizing the importance of family life, we are of the opinion that society should give through social work, special facilities for part-time work and in other ways, an opportunity to women to contribute their mite to the problems and demands of the wider world, still leaving them all the time that they should really have to discharge their responsibilities of motherhood and home keeping'.<sup>17</sup>

While setting up curricula and syllabi that is supposed to cater specifically to women, it is understood that besides

*'nobility and spirituality of personal character, dutifulness and responsibility of citizenship, training for a useful vocation, profession or some social work in life, for girls, preparation for the duties of mother, efficient home maker and a valued and esteemed colleague and companion in life are objectives that a sound educational system which the curriculum, to the extent it is planned or controlled , should have in view'<sup>18</sup>*  
(emphasis in the original).

Infact, it is further suggested that the providers of such knowledge should also be women because

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 8- Curricula and Syllabi, p. 83

'it is generally admitted by educationists that women are better fitted by *nature, aptitude* and interest to teach young children and to guide adolescent girls. The care of the young is one of the tasks for which they are *biologically fitted and in teaching they are able to transfer their maternal instincts*, even if in a diluted form, to a wider field...women, by nature, are endowed with three major qualities essential for teaching, i.e., 'the desire to teach, something to teach and sympathy with the young' (emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup>

The Second Plan does recognize that girls education would require immediate attention in the succeeding years and because 'public opinion in every part of the country is not alive to the importance of girls education, special efforts at educating parents combined with efforts to make education more closely related to the *needs of girls* would be made ( my emphasis).<sup>20</sup>

The Second Plan also dealt with women in the chapter on Labour Policy and Programs. The plan contended that

'special attention has to be paid to women workers because of problems peculiar to them. Comparatively speaking they are much less organized. They also suffer from certain social prejudices and physical disabilities. That women are comparatively less suited for heavy work and are more vulnerable to situations in industry which produce fatigue are used as arguments to justify views which are often held in support of lower wages for them... The fact that simply because women's abilities are different does not necessarily mean that they constitute a lower class of workers, is overlooked... The

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 9- Training and Employment of Women Teachers, p. 93

<sup>20</sup> Second Five Year Plan, *op.cit.*, Chapter 23, p. 504

special cares and duties, which fall to women necessarily, place them under some handicap as industrial workers... In particular, women should be protected against injurious work, should receive maternity benefits, and work place should provide crèche facilities for children. The principle of equal pay for equal work needs to be more vigorously implemented and the tendency to scale down the jobs traditionally handled by women has to be guarded against...<sup>21</sup>

While it is commendable that the planners recognized the importance of the principle of equal pay for equal work and of the need to open up opportunities for women to compete for higher jobs, the planners still did not display an understanding of why, certain jobs were 'traditionally' performed by women. In other words, the question of sexual division of labour was left intact in the Second Plan.

Further, though social prejudices that work towards making women a lower class of workers are critiqued, the planners actually ended up upholding the same labour hierarchy that they intended to dismantle. Reproduction, which is a socially useful and necessary activity, gets categorized as a handicap and a disability. While there would definitely be a need for maternity benefits and crèches for children so that women could perform their work, the logic of these facilities stems from the fact that these would help women deal with their handicap that arises from child-bearing and child-rearing activities.

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 27- Labour Policy and Program, p. 584

In 1956, the Women's Department came out with a Handbook on *Constructive Programme for Women*. The General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, K.P. Madhavan Nair, in the preface, emphasized on the

'immense work awaiting social workers in the sphere of constructive activities among women, maternity and child welfare, after care and social and *moral hygiene*, apart from the program of *general uplift* and education of women'.<sup>22</sup> (my emphasis).

Mukul Mukherjee, Incharge of the Women's Department, maintained that

'women have a very distinctive role to play in the constructive sphere. They have to work for the welfare of the nation and the State by first working for their own welfare. It means that all *their* welfare activities have *ultimately* to be fitted in the *larger welfare of the entire community*...Let our sisters answer the call, with all their *traditional earnestness* and *vigour*. The more they act, the more they will achieve'.<sup>23</sup> (my emphasis).

The welfare projects were extended in the Second Plan period. However, there was no innovation of any kind in the programs and activities in the projects. The *Handbook* says 'the programs and activities in the projects relate to the welfare (sic) of women and children. They comprise Balwadis, Pre- schools, maternity

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<sup>22</sup> K.P. Madhavan Nair in the Preface, *Constructive Program for Women: A Handbook*, New Delhi, Indian National Congress, 1958

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, Introduction

and infant health services, social education for women, arts and crafts centers and some general cultural and recreational activities.<sup>24</sup>

The Second Plan's aim was to move towards a socialist pattern of society, i.e., a better intellectual and cultural life. However, when it came to its approach towards its women citizens, the plan continued to locate women within the domestic realm. This is pretty much evident when one looks at the education policy envisaged for women or in that the cultural activities for women are solely restricted to arts and crafts centers. As far as reduction of economic disparities is concerned, apart from recognizing that there should be equal pay for equal work, the plan does not say anything at all about how economic status of women should be uplifted. Re-distribution of economic power and wealth would require a re-arrangement of social relationships, something that the Five Year Plan mentions, but does nothing about. The Second Plan does not envisage any such program, and pretty much ends up constructing an image of a woman whose primary task is to perform housewifely duties and bear and rear children. The Plan, in other words, does not look at women as productive, economic beings, but primarily as a category of people who need welfare of the kind the State thinks is best for them.

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13



## PART THREE

### *Third Five Year Plan 1961-66*

The Third Plan reaffirms the move towards a socialistic pattern of society. The pictures of society thus envisaged would have equal opportunities for people, re-distribution of economic power, decrease in income disparities and economic and social integration.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, the thrust of the Third Plan was on agriculture and moving towards making India a self-reliant country in terms of food grain production.

The Third Plan's goal was 'achieving rapid economic development and technological progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunity.'<sup>26</sup> Concerted efforts were to be made in the area of girl's education and the disparities in levels of developments in education between boys and girls were to be substantially reduced.<sup>27</sup> In the section on elementary education, the Plan mentions that efforts would be made to bring girls to school in sufficient numbers. The Plan makes a note of the suggestions put forward by the National Council for Women's Education for promoting the education of girls at the primary, middle and secondary stages.

These included

<sup>25</sup> Government of India, *Third Five Year Plan 1961-66*, Chapter I- Objectives of Planned Development, Planning Commission. pp. 1-18

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 29 - Education, p. 573

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*



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'the provision of quarters for women teachers, special allowances for women teachers working in rural areas, condensed educational courses for adult women so as to enlarge the supply of women teachers, stipends for women teacher trainees, attendance prizes and scholarships, appointment of school-mothers in co-educational institutions and provision of necessary amenities.'<sup>28</sup>

These recommendations seem to suggest that the only thing that comes in the way of girls' education at the primary, middle and secondary levels is the lack of women teachers. That the Plan does not mention any suggestion any further for bolstering girls' education is indicative of the paucity of theoretical understanding of the reasons that come in the way of girls' education. To some extent, the logic of the State sounds extremely convoluted and as a researcher one seriously wonders how a State that sets premium on education can go so wrong with its analysis of hindrances that come in the way of girls' education. Elsewhere, in the section on women's education, it was suggested that *courses of special interest to women* like Home Science, Music, Drawing, Painting, Nursing, etc, would be expanded. Further it was recognized that there was a shortage of educated women for taking up various occupations, like teaching and hence there was a need to increase the proportion of women students in colleges and universities.<sup>29</sup> This is indicative of the fact that the planners had a pre-conceived idea of where educated women ought to be employed. It is not a co-incidence that bulk of the

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 579

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 590

school teachers are women and there has been a consistent State policy at work that has ensured this phenomenon.

As far as the health of women is concerned, the overriding concern is for expectant mother and the child. The Third Plan also unceremoniously removes women from the section on Welfare Programmes.

## **PART FOUR**

### ***Fourth Five Year Plan 1969-74***

The Fourth Plan links up education with manpower. 'A suitably oriented system of education can facilitate and promote social change and contribute to economic growth by training skilled manpower for specific tasks of development...'<sup>30</sup> The thrust was again on the expansion of elementary education and on the provision of facilities for backward areas and communities and for girls.

The Fourth Plan document does not *per se* refer to women either in the sections of health or social welfare. However, the annual reports of the Department of Social Welfare outline some programs initiated for women during the Fourth Plan period. The annual report of the year 1970-71 mentions building of girls' hostels for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) at the middle and secondary stage so as to add to the availability of women workers from among

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<sup>30</sup> Government of India, *Fourth Five Year Plan 1969-74*. Chapter 16- Education and Manpower, Planning Commission, New Delhi, p. 52

these communities for the welfare of these Backward Classes.<sup>31</sup> Further, there is a small section on women's welfare that actually speaks of welfare schemes for destitute women.<sup>32</sup> The annual reports of the years 1972-73 and 1973-74 had chapters on women's welfare and both spoke primarily of hostels for working women in big cities and of training camps for rural women. Interestingly, the camp scheme called the Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh was aimed at 'building up village leadership and to ensure a proper climate of public cooperation in the implementation of the various development programs in the rural areas.'<sup>33</sup>

The Fourth Plan quite unceremoniously debunks even the welfare concerns for women. The scheme of hostels for SC/ST women was an ongoing scheme that was only carried forward. Building hostels for working women was a new scheme started in 1972-73. Overall, the Fourth Plan did not pay much attention to women's concerns and women largely remained outside the purview of the State's welfare schemes.

## **PART FIVE**

### **The Committee on Status of India Report – Towards Equality**

During the Fourth Plan period, a Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up in 1971 and it was to study six areas of importance to women, i.e.,

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<sup>31</sup> Government of India, *Annual Report 1970-71*, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, p. 14

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84-85

<sup>33</sup> Annual Reports 1972-73, pp31-32, 1973-74, pp.27-28

social, legal, political, educational, economic and employment. The Towards Equality Report of 1974 produced by the CSWI became in some sense the founding text for women's question in post-independence India. The Towards Equality Report brought to light the fact that the constitutional guarantee of equality between sexes had not worked towards securing for women an equal status in society, that the development process had affected men and women unequally primarily because the questions of sexual inequality were never grounded in politics. Further, it pointed out that even in the three areas identified by the Planning Commission for women's welfare: education, health and welfare, the proportional allocation of funds for programmes in these areas had steadily declined in successive plans with funds for welfare measures coming down from 24.1% in the First Plan to only 11.17% in the Fifth Plan.<sup>34</sup>

The Towards Equality Report laid emphasis on areas that had hitherto not been addressed at all by the State. For instance, it examined the legal status of women in India and looked at how the laws of the country treated women. It examined women's status with special reference to marriage, divorce, adoption and guardianship of children, maintenance and inheritance, matrimonial property, family courts, Uniform Civil Code (UCC), reforms in criminal law and laws relating to nationality.<sup>35</sup> It recommended changes in these laws because it was found that these discriminated against women and perpetuated women's unequal status in society. It also focused on women's economic status. The Report highlighted that

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<sup>34</sup> A Synopsis of the Committee on Status of Women in India Report, ICSSR, p. 117

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 39-58

women's economic participation had been declining both in percentage of workers to total female population and in their percentage to the total labour force.<sup>36</sup> Further, it pointed out that the

'gradual commercialization and modernization of the economy and the efforts made by the government to replace traditional by modern institutions of credit and marketing, to stabilize ownership of land and to maintain minimum wages had not succeeded in organizing the production relations or in controlling the degree of exploitation of the weaker section, either in agricultural or non-agricultural occupation in the unorganized sector'.<sup>37</sup> The Committee also pointed out that the principle of equal wages for equal work had not been seriously applied and most industries continued to maintain wage differentials.<sup>38</sup>

Education has been one area where the State has invested in from the very beginning. The Report commended that the progress of women's education in post-independence period but rightly leveled critiques at the policy of laying emphasis on different curricula for girls, with accent on subjects considered especially suitable for them such as domestic science, needlework or fine arts. It highlighted that this resulted in 'failure to provide subjects such as sciences and mathematics in most girls' institutions'.<sup>39</sup> The Report recommended a common course of general education till end of class X. The Report critiqued the national level plans for educational development for not having taken social and regional imbalances into account while drafting educational policies.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 5, Roles, Rights and Opportunities for Economic Participation, p. 61

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 6- Educational Development, p.98

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.97

The Report pointed out that the particular health problems faced by women especially from the developing countries were: higher maternal and infant mortality; maternal morbidity; lower expectation of life at birth; malnutrition; mental disorders; high suicide rate; and certain sex selective diseases. 'As child-bearing and rearing is still the dominant role assigned to women, maternity becomes a special problem in the context of the socio-economic status of the bulk of the population with inadequate housing, sanitation, and poor medicinal facilities.'<sup>40</sup>

The thrust of the first four plans had solely been on maternal and child health. All other factors influencing/ having an impact on women's health were not taken into account. Infact, maternity and child health services also showed wide regional variations. The Report pointed out that 'the impacts of these services have not been uniform because factors such as education, employment, and cultural norms were variables that had influenced the utilization of services'.<sup>41</sup> Further, the MCH services had faced neglect despite consistent investment because of over concentration on family planning.<sup>42</sup> The Report critiqued the dominant understanding of the planners that family planning had direct consequences for improvement in the status of women. In the researches conducted by the CSWI, it was found that, 'improved status of women, with a rise in the age of marriage, better education, employment, better living conditions,

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, Policies and Programmes for Women, p. 119

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 122

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 123

and greater general awareness, had a direct impact on the acceptance of family planning methods.<sup>43</sup>

The third area where the State concentrated was welfare services for women. While the programmes in rural areas aimed to help and mobilize women in villages for their development, the programmes in urban areas largely meant construction of working women's hostels. The Report pointed out that the welfare programmes attempted to improve earning power, but they did not have the desired impact. For instance, in the rural areas 'difficulties in getting raw material, credit and marketing finished products made many programs commercially non-viable. The training was imparted only in production, skills, not in organization and marketing,'<sup>44</sup> Other programmes like Social Defence Programme for the 'correction and rehabilitation of Women', (i.e., suppression of immoral traffic, after care services, and welfare services in prisons) also suffered because 'no formal arrangements for marketing these products are made, nor are the inmates given any training to organize production and marketing.'<sup>45</sup> Besides the programs for providing homes for the aged and destitute women suffered because they were highly inadequate in terms of the population to be covered.<sup>46</sup>

Coming back to the approach of the first four Five Year Plans and the particular way in which they articulated women's concerns, one can say that women were

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*



seen as a category of people needing welfare services. However, welfare being non-productive item invariably gets low priority in comparison to other sectors. The CSWI report pointed out that 'a major part of the allocations made for these programmes is spent on maintenance and establishment charges, leaving little for actual services,'<sup>47</sup>

The need for putting welfare services or programs for women emanated from the recognition of the fact that inequality between sexes exists and the goal of social justice necessitated that special effort is made to rectify the situation. In place were put a number of programs that intended to correct this imbalance. Though re-adaptation of social institutions and social relationships is envisaged as a Plan goal, the State's efforts really fell short of initiating these changes. In the conception of the State, the woman primarily remains a mother, endowed with natural instincts for maternity and such other qualities like a natural carer and nurturer. In other words, the State upholds an essentialist and a biologically determined understanding of woman. In such a conception, not only are women treated as lower classes of workers, but also as a category of people whose place in society, in terms of what they *essentially* are and what they ought to do is predetermined. The welfare measures of the State, hence, were really geared towards helping women effectively perform their *legitimate* duties.

The CSWI Report launched a systematic critique on the State policies on women and highlighted discrepancies in them. It brought attention to the fact that the

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

State had left many areas, like that of laws, untouched. However the CSWI Report did not critique the State for its theoretical impoverishment in understanding women's situation. The Report itself did not envisage a transformative plan for women. In its approach, the Report says ' marriage and motherhood should not become disabilities, preventing women from fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of national development for which society, including *women themselves*, must accept their *due* responsibility'. The Report suggests *special temporary* measures to move in the direction of the goals set by the Constitution and to transform *de jure* equality into a *de facto* one. In other words, the CSWI also at best suggested measures that *could* make women equal citizens, but did not quite envisage an overarching policy for women citizens that would make the constitutional guarantee of equality a reality for women.

However, this is not to undermine the importance of the Towards Equality Report. It was the first systematic study that critiqued the Indian State's stance towards its women citizens and highlighted areas where much work needed to be done. The Fifth Five Year Plan should be situated within the context of the submission of the Report of the CSWI, which also coincided with the International Women's Decade. A major outcome of the CSWI was the National Plan of Action (NPA), 1976 that provided guidelines based on the UN World Plan of Action for Women. The NPA identified health, family planning, nutrition, education, employment, legislation and social welfare as areas the State needed to

concentrate upon to better the lives of women. An immediate outcome of the NPA was the setting up of the Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in 1976 under the Ministry of Social Welfare to act as a nodal point within the Government of India to coordinate policies and programmes and initiate measures for women's development. It is in the context of this background that the Fifth Plan should be situated.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Programs for Development of Women: 1975-1990**

The decade of the seventies saw the release of the Towards Equality by the CSWI. The Towards Equality Report was the first comprehensively researched document on the condition of Indian Women. The empirically grounded gender specific research by the CSWI had highlighted the structural constraints that operated in the socio- economic and political system and inhibited women's progress. The publication of the Report was also accompanied by systematic research on problems confronting Indian women and hurdles that came in the way of achieving the goal of equality for women. Women's studies and researches critiqued and challenged assumptions about the nature of women's work, their contribution to family, society and economy, thereby developing new perspective through examining basic concepts and institutions like family, household, dependent wife, women's work, etc.<sup>1</sup> An attempt was made to make visible women's work and to underscore the fact that domestic work is time consuming, labour intensive and socially vital.<sup>2</sup>

The Towards Equality Report had brought to light that a mere constitutional guarantee for equality between sexes could not provide substantive equality and guarantee that fruits of development process would equally benefit all sections of

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<sup>1</sup> Sadhana Arya, Women,2000, *Gender Equality and the State*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publication Pvt. Ltd, p.94

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

society, including women. It highlighted that development process had affected women and men differently because women had been historically disadvantaged and welfare services of the Indian State had not sought to correct these structural constraints. The development process was critiqued for displaying ignorance of women's perspective.

Internationally, there were an increasing number of researches on the effects of economic development on women and linkages between poverty, population growth, basic human needs and women's role in production and reproduction.<sup>3</sup> Increase in population growth was begun to be understood as a major reason for poverty and low living standards and a potential threat to resources of the world. This was of course a typical first world discourse on poverty and it was felt that the role and status of women was a vital variable having an influence on fertility decisions. In other words, there was an attempt to establish conceptual links between women's concerns and economic development. This gave legitimacy to the idea that women's issues have developmental implications.<sup>4</sup> This understanding led to the emergence of the new approach to concerns of women termed as 'Women in Development' (WID) approach. Consequently the year 1975 was declared as the International Women's Year and the integration of women in development was affirmed as the goal of the year. Integration of women in development (WID) was the declared goal of the decade 1975-85, a goal avowed by the Indian planners. The WID approach was premised on two

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.96  
<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

things. One, women had been neglected in the development process and two, as a human resource there was a need to make an effective use of women, if economic development had to take place.<sup>5</sup> Theoretically, the idea of integrating women into economic development carried with it the goals of education, employment, equality and empowerment; in the Indian context it was the first two that received immediate attention in the decade.<sup>6</sup> The Fifth, Sixth and the Seventh plan were the carriers of the notion of women in development. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first three parts attempt an analysis of the Fifth, Sixth and the Seventh Plan respectively and the fourth section briefly looks at the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988- 2000 followed by concluding remarks.

## ***PART ONE***

### ***Fifth Five Year Plan 1974-79***

The Fifth Plan sought to enlarge the concept of social welfare. The planners at the outset accepted that in the previous decades, emphasis had singularly been on curative and rehabilitative services and 'preventive' and 'developmental' aspects of social welfare had not received adequate attention. The plan says that, 'this was partly due to lack of adequate data on social problems, and partly due to the lack of integration between social and economic planning.'<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.103

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Draft Fifth Five Year Plan 1974-79*, Planning Commission, New Delhi, p.278.

enlargement of social welfare meant that it was to be considered as an organized function designed to enable families, groups and communities to cope with social problems arising out of changing social conditions, particularly in regard to the structure of the family and its functions. The new approach would aim at a proper integration of welfare and developmental services... welfare services will be promoted taking the family as a unit of development and integrated with programmes of employment, economic development and *distributive justice*<sup>8</sup> (emphasis mine). Welfare programmes were affected for women in 'need' of care and protection, women from low-income families, needy women with dependent children and working women. A program of functional literacy, which would endow women with necessary knowledge and *skills to perform the functions of the house-wife, such as child care, nutrition, health care, home economies, etc. will be launched for women in the age-group 15-45* (emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup> Taking note of the suggestions of the Towards Equality Report, the Fifth Plan was to also attempt diversification of trades in the production-cum-training units based on improved technology.<sup>10</sup> Besides, managerial and sales training was to be provided to the marketability of goods produced in different units.<sup>11</sup>

The Fifth Plan in particular does not give details of what programs were to be launched. The Annual Reports of the Department of Social Welfare during the plan period mention policies and programs meant for women's welfare. Hostels

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 279

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

for working women in cities, training camps for rural women, scheme of Functional Literacy for Adult Women are three policy programs mentioned in the 1974-75 Annual Report. Out of these, Functional Literacy for Adult Women for the age group 15-45 was a new scheme that was launched in the Five Year Plan. The objectives of the scheme were:-

1. to enable illiterate women to acquire skills of literacy, through functional literacy classes and participate in the developmental effort of the community;
2. to promote a better awareness among women of modern methods of health and hygiene (including population control) and of the importance of nutritious and protein rich food;
3. to impart needs-based training in home management and child-care;
4. to bring about *attitudinal changes among women, so as to enable them to play their role as citizens of the country*, (emphasis mine)
5. to adopt appropriate follow-up measures to sustain the interest of the beneficiaries in their newly acquired skills.<sup>12</sup>

The scheme was to offer non-formal education using functional literacy as the means, covering the subjects of 1. elements of health and hygiene, 2. food and nutrition; 3. home management and child care; 4. civic education; and 5.

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<sup>12</sup> *Annual Report 1975-76*, Chapter 4- Women's Welfare, Ministry of Welfare, pp. 24-25



vocational and occupational skills.<sup>13</sup> The scheme was to be managed by Gram Sevikas and local lady teachers.<sup>14</sup>

The year 1975 was also proclaimed as the 'International Women's Year' and in India a National Committee was set up to finalize program for the year and to review the implementation of the approved program for women. The Annual Reports of the Ministry of Social Welfare changed the chapter on Women's Welfare to Women's Welfare and Development 1976 onwards. The Annual Report of the year 1976-77 mentions the efforts put in by the government to review legislation-affecting women's status. Among other laws, it makes a mention of the fact that efforts were underway to make Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 more effective and the age of marriage for girls was to be raised from 15 to 18 and for boys from 18 to 21 at the recommendation of the National Population Policy.<sup>15</sup> This bill took the form of Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill in 1977. This Bill sought to increase the minimum age of marriage from 15-16 years for women and from 18 to 21 years for males.<sup>16</sup>

The Annual Reports of the year 1978-79 and the 1979-80 do not mention anything new for women's welfare and development. The CSWI had recommended setting up of national machinery 'to coordinate and intensify the efforts and measures needed for women's welfare and development'.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Annual Report 1976-77*, Chapter 3- Women's Welfare and Development, Ministry of Welfare, pp. 26-27

<sup>16</sup> *Annual Report 1977-78*, Chapter 3 – Women's Welfare and Development, Ministry of Welfare, pp.28-29

Accordingly, a national machinery was set up in India for women's welfare and development was put in place and it consisted of a National Committee, a steering committee of the National Committee, an Intra-departmental Coordination Committee, and Women's Welfare and Development Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

The significance of the Fifth Plan lies in the fact that it did recognize that developmental aspects of social welfare had not received adequate attention and that there was a need to do more researches on social problems that women face. Further, at least theoretically this was the first plan that admitted women *could* face problems because of the structure of the family and its function. However, the understanding ends there. No coherent theoretical understanding of women's' unequal status arises out of this observation. As far as the policies and programs for women are concerned, they also did not reflect any fundamental change from the previous year. For instance, the program of functional literacy was basically geared towards making women better home makers. On the other hand, the age of marriage for girls was initially proposed to be raised to 18 from 16. The Annual Report of 1977-78 mentions that the bill sought to raise it from 15 to 16 only. Clearly, the guiding factor in this case was National Population Policy and not the fact that early motherhood was detrimental for women's health.

Though the Fifth Plan sought to enlarge the concept of social welfare, in the area of welfare for women, it did very little and continued with policies that were

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<sup>17</sup> *Annual Report 1979-80*, Chapter 4, Women's Welfare and Development, Ministry of Welfare, pp. 30-31

already in place. For instance, the only scheme the State could put its finger on for urban women was making more hostels for working women. The names of the chapters in the Annual Report change from 'Women's Welfare' to 'Women's Welfare and Development', but there was not any significant change in the way the State theorized women's concerns. The concerns and solutions remained largely the same.

## **PART TWO**

### ***Sixth Five-Year Plan 1980-85***

The Sixth Five Year Plan was formulated 'taking into account the achievements and failures of the past three decades of planning, recent economic developments which have a bearing on the growth prospects of the economy in the medium term as well as the vision of the future... The removal of poverty would be the foremost objective of the Sixth Plan.'<sup>18</sup>

The Sixth Plan had a separate chapter on women called 'Women and Development.' An analysis of the past three decades, the plan contended, highlighted various drawbacks that came in the way of women's development. These had mainly been 'pre-occupation with repeated pregnancies without respite in physical workload, lack of education, formal and informal and a preponderance of social prejudices along with lack of independent economic

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<sup>18</sup> *Sixth Five Year Plan 1980- 85*, Chapter 3- Objective and Strategy of the Sixth Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, p.32

generation activity or independent assets.<sup>19</sup> The plan of action was to concentrate on three areas, education, employment and health. In addition, 'the voluntary adoption of the small family norm had to be promoted among all couples.'<sup>20</sup>

The development strategy initiated in the Sixth Plan was to focus on family as a unit of development and attention was to be given to the most vulnerable members in the family. Women were identified as the most vulnerable members in the family. Hence, 'the economic emancipation of the family with specific attention to women, education of children and family planning were to constitute the three major operational aspects of the family-entered poverty alleviation strategy.'<sup>21</sup> Further, the plan suggested that 'in order to understand and analyze the *backwardness* of women, a disaggregated view of the problem, according to groups, communities and areas is necessary.'<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis in the Sixth Plan was on economic independence to improve the status of women. To achieve this, the government was to, 'give joint titles to husband and wife in all development activities involving transfer of assets... within programs like distribution of land and house-sites and beneficiary oriented economic units.'<sup>23</sup> Further, Mahila Mandals and other voluntary agencies were to

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 27- Women and Development, p.424

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.425

be geared up for providing wages and self-employment in rural areas.<sup>24</sup> Places where employment of women was to be increased were in schemes for Public Distribution System (PDS), rural godowns, Operations Flood II, Dairy Development and Social Forestry and in *armed services* (emphasis mine). Modernization of traditional occupations of women such as spinning and weaving, match-making, coir, cashew, rural marketing, agriculture, animal husbandry and fishery was to be encouraged to benefit women.<sup>25</sup> Diversification and expansion of education and training opportunities was to be brought about for women to promote their employability.

In the area of education, the effort was towards securing higher enrolment and retention of girls in school. For this, the plan contented, 'Balwadi-cum-creches' attached to the schools would be required to enable the girls to attend school since otherwise they would have to stay at home to look after the younger brothers and sisters in the absence of mothers at work. It would also require income generation work for girls outside the school hours to supplement the family's income.<sup>26</sup> For boosting the education of women belonging to backward classes, the number of girls' hostels was to be increased. Also, women's polytechnics were to be built to impart training in arts, crafts etc.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.425

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426

In the area of health, provisions were to be made for continuing and expanding the Maternity and Child Health care facilities including ante natal, natal and post natal services. Family welfare programs were to receive highest priority. It was understood that to solve the problem of malnutrition in women, employment would be generated as the same would provide *purchasing power* to women which in turn will impact on her as well as her family's nutritional status. Nutrition interventions targeting the most vulnerable groups of women, i.e., pregnant and nursing mothers from the weakest sections of the society were to get nutrition supplement under the Supplementary Nutrition Program.<sup>28</sup>

The annual reports of the Ministry of Social Welfare during the Sixth Plan Period mention the specific programs that were in operation for women. Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in the Ministry of Social Welfare was the main body in charge of coordinating women's welfare and development programs. The schemes mentioned were Hostels for working women, programs offered by Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) to assist projects sponsored by public undertakings/ corporations and autonomous bodies for setting up training-cum-employment-cum-production units. This program was to provide sustained employment to women. The target group for this program was rural poor women, women from weaker sections, war widows, widows of the employees of the enterprises that took up this program and poor women of urban

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

slum areas.<sup>29</sup> Then there were programs for rehabilitation of women in distress who included young and old widows, victims of kidnapping, unmarried mothers, women whose husbands were jailed and women deserted by their husbands. The scheme of Functional Literacy for Adult Women that was started in 1975-76 was continued and its emphasis remained on subjects of health and hygiene, food and nutrition, home management, child-care.

In the context of revised national priorities, among other things an increased focus on population control and internal and domestic pressure of a growing women's movement, the Sixth Plan laid greater emphasis on women's economic role. Development of women was seen as an important indicator of a country's development. The Sixth Plan defined women's concerns not only as health, education, family planning and child-care but also as employment and productivity. In other words, at least theoretically an attempt was made to see women as productive beings rather than just a category of people for whom State would forever have to facilitate welfare measures. The plan contended that the non-recognition of development and economic issues as women's issues had led to women's low economic status in society. The lack of access to productive resources and education were cited as important reasons that came in the way of women's development and stressed on employment generation for women. The decision to give joint titles to husband and wife in activities involving transfer of assets was a radical one. On the one hand, the emphasis was largely on

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<sup>29</sup> *Annual Reports* 1982- 83 (pp. 38-46), 1983 –84 (pp. 83-84), 1984 – 85 (pp.26- 30), Chapter 3- Women's Welfare and Development, Ministry of Social Welfare.

generating employment opportunities, on the other, the plan drew attention to an apparent 'special problem facing women like preference for male child for social and cultural reasons.<sup>30</sup> The way to go about addressing this *special problem* was by 'awareness, understanding and action.<sup>31</sup> One of the important drawbacks in women's development was identified as women's *pre-occupation* with repeated pregnancies. In this context, special emphasis was placed on providing minimum health facilities integrated with family welfare and nutrition of women and children. The Sixth Plan viewed women's health needs mainly from the point of view of a mother and did not articulate any new health needs of women that was different from the previous plans.

The image of women that emerges even in the Sixth Plan remains basically that of a mother and unpaid housewife and is definitely not an empowering one. Women's employment is perceived as a supplement to the family income or to raise their own status or enhancing the capabilities of mothers to look after the health and nutritional needs of children and family.

The purpose of rural women's employment has been stated like this in the Sixth Plan. 'With an increase in women's employment, the incomes of the household would go up, thereby, resulting not only in raising the nutrition and child-care in the family but also bringing down the birth-rate and infant mortality rate.'<sup>32</sup> Emphasis on the role of women as mothers is also evident from the purpose of

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<sup>30</sup> Sixth Five Year Plan, *op. cit.*, p.424

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426



education cited in the Plan. For instance, the Plan states, '[E]ducation will be imparted on the production and consumption of nutritious foods and on the adoption of simple horticultural remedies involving kitchen gardening to cure major nutritional maladies...'<sup>33</sup> The idea that women are and must remain responsible for household chores remains intact.

Interestingly, among such areas like dairy development, forestry, spinning and weaving, the plan mentions that women's employment would be increased in the armed forces. Increasing women's employment in the armed forces comes as quite a surprise to the reader because no plan before or after the Sixth even so much as touches on the subject. The precise mention of armed forces in the middle of programs largely meant for employment generation for rural women sounds jarring, if not fake.

While the approach of the planners towards women represented a definite advance from welfare-oriented approach, the understanding of women's unequal status in society was still not theoretically located in the sexual politics that perpetuates women's subordinate status. To that extent, the dominant understanding that women had been left out of the development process, and there was a need to integrate women into the overall development process, was at best a limited one. The integrationist perspective among other things already stated, found expression in various self-employment and income-generating programs like IRDP, TRYSEM, NREP, Development of Women and Children in

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

## Rural Areas (DWCRA) and Support for Employment Program for Women (STEP).

These programs had their genesis in the poverty alleviation strategy adopted by the state in the 1970's. The end of the decade of sixties saw planners realize that mass-poverty and unemployment were widespread despite two decades of planning.<sup>34</sup> A need to launch a direct attack on the problems of poverty and unemployment was felt. One way of tackling poverty was by giving employment to people. Hence, the plan of action was to identify the poorest among the poor for giving employment. The assumption behind the strategy was that the poor (in this case women) had been left behind in the development process due to illiteracy, lack of skills and infrastructure, credit facilities, technical training, etc. hence, the solution was to give them education, training and credit that would help increase income and raise consumption levels. Most of the employment generation schemes worked via rural development schemes. The objective was to select target groups and help to overcome difficulties in income generation. The strategy did not have the objective of negotiating unequal inter-relationships at all. Studies on the working of these policies have shown that the reach of these programs has been to very limited women and an overwhelming number of beneficiaries have been men. The programs focus mainly on providing work to the poor and the issues of discrimination against women, whether in allotting work or in giving lesser wages, developing mechanisms to ensure that women are given preference in the programs or to provide child-care facilities so that

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<sup>34</sup> Sixth Five Year Plan, *op cit.*, Chapter 1, 2, 3

wage employment does not become an added burden on women, were not addressed by the programs.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, self-employment programs like IRDP and TRYSEM also promoted activities that could be carried on easily at home along with household chores and child-rearing. As mentioned elsewhere in the chapter, self-employment was meant to enable women to supplement their family income and eventually to achieve economic parity with men. However, this would also require an overhaul in production relations and unequal structure of land relations, changes in property laws, etc and these were issues left completely outside of any State intervention. Further, the focus was mainly on seeing family as a unit and hence on the consumption levels of family via women's employment and not bringing about a change in women's position.

In the TRYSEM program, the skills taught were traditional and stereotyped. Besides, while imparting training no attempt was made to assess the ability and aptitude of women towards self-employment and the selection of trades were done without any regard for financial viability of the candidates.<sup>36</sup> All these schemes continue through the Seventh Five Year Plan as well and the thrust during the Seventh Plan is also an integrationist approach.

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<sup>35</sup> *Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women in the Informal Sector* (NCSW) 1988, pp. 81-82

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.234

## PART THREE

### *Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-90*

The goals of the Seventh Five Year Plan were set keeping in mind the coming century. The aims and objectives were to be related to the goals that the nation had for the year 2000. Specifically, it meant 'elimination of poverty and creating conditions of near full employment, the satisfaction of the basic needs of the people in terms of food, clothing and shelter, attainment of universal elementary education, and access to health facilities for all.'<sup>37</sup> The central objective of the development strategy of the Seventh Plan was generation of productive employment to 'reduce poverty and bring about an improvement in the quality of life for the poor in the villages and towns.'<sup>38</sup> This approach was in continuation of the development strategy outlines at the beginning of the Sixth Five Year Plan.

The Seventh Plan sought to 'inculcate confidence among women and bring about an awareness of their own potential for development, as also their rights and privileges.'<sup>39</sup> The major programs included education, health and employment. In the area of education, the emphasis was on 100% coverage in elementary education for children up to 14 years of age. Educational campaigns for tackling the prejudices and socio-religious constraints were to be taken up on a wider scale since nearly 3/4 of the school children were girls.<sup>40</sup> The Seventh Plan too makes an apparent logical connection between availability of women teachers

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<sup>37</sup> Government of India, *Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-90*, Chapter 2, Planning Commission, p. 8

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 3, p.23

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 14, p.321

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.325

and enhancement of girls' enrolment and retention in schools. IRDP, NREP, TRYSEM were to have components of functional literacy. Contrary to the setting up of co-educational institutes, the Seventh Plan envisaged that women's polytechnics were to be encouraged. In the area of women's health, the thrust was on the reduction of the prevailing high maternal and infant mortality rates. In other words, the emphasis was on the expansion of Maternity and Child Health Care Services.

The section on employment for women in the Seventh Plan sub-divided the section into many sectors. Horticultural research and development programs were thought to, 'play a significant role in economic and nutritional progress, particularly with respect to the problem of under-nutrition of pregnant women and nursing mothers and their children.'<sup>41</sup> Schemes like IRDP and TRYSEM were to continue. The Report of the National Commission on Self Employed in the Informal Sector (NCSW), released in 1988 critiqued these programs at many levels. So, in recognition of the fact that these programs were not reaching the women members of the target group household or even women headed household, the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was launched as a sub-scheme of IRDP.<sup>42</sup> DWCRA was meant to be a program only for women. It adopted group approach as against individual approach of IRDP and it emphasized non-economic activities as constituting a key element of the program. The Ministry of Rural Development came out with a booklet,

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 326

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54

'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas', in August 1984 and it had a plan of action that was to guide DWCRA. The booklet, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Seventh Plan emphasizes the need to give self-employment to women with the aim of improving the conditions of the family. The scheme aimed to improve the status of women in 4 ways:

1. as productive and confident members of society,
2. as earning members of family,
3. as equal partners with men in bettering living conditions of their families,  
and,
4. as mothers and home makers

The productivity part for women is thought of in purely economical sense in the booklet. In other words, defining women's productive work only within the reference of economics invariably categorizes all the domestic work, child bearing and rearing, and subsistence work done by women as unproductive. Only that work is productive for which one gets paid. Similarly, the third point suggests that until now women were not in any way involved in bettering the family. The work women do inside the house was not counted as productive work. In other words, while women were expected to take on economic activities like men, they were also expected to carry on their duties as mothers and wives. Infact, the Seventh Plan suggests that Science and Technology would be used to reduce the drudgery of women, so that time was left for developmental

activities.<sup>43</sup> Projects were sponsored for the development of smokeless chullahs, use of solar cookers, setting up of bio-gas plants and devices for improving the water purification system.<sup>44</sup> The booklet sums up, 'if all this is done then the daily drudgery that women have to undergo in the home will be lessened and they will become more efficient in their homes and in their work.'<sup>45</sup>

Though income generation schemes were quite a departure from earlier welfarist approach in so far as there was a recognition of improving women's employment opportunities, but the primary role of women as mothers and housewives was reinforced. Infact, reports like the NCSW point that segregation of work between women and men was reinforced and women were pushed into labour intensive, low paid, home based and part time jobs. In that sense, women's work and income was seen only as supplementing the main income of the male breadwinner.

During the seventh plan period, Shramshakti- The Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector and The National Perspective Plan for Women 1988 – 2000 A.D. (NPP) were released. The NPP was an exercise planned within the Government and attempted to look at the Indian women in a holistic way, across the labour force / non- labour sector and organized / unorganized sector divide unlike Shramshakti. The scope of the recommendations of the NPP was much wider primarily

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 324

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 324

<sup>45</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Rural development and UNICEF, *DWCRA*, 1984

because of the broader term of reference it had. The NPP exercise also witnessed a stand off situation between the Government and the women's groups of the country on substantive content of the report as well as on wider issues of relationships and partnership between state agencies and representatives of the women's movement.<sup>46</sup> I think it is important to look at the NPP primarily because of the vast area that it was evaluating and the dissatisfaction of the women's groups with the document. In effect, a standoff of the kind mentioned above becomes very significant because the charge against the Government was of ignoring the voices of those it sought to represent in the first place.

#### **PART FOUR**

##### ***National Perspective Plan for Women 1988- 2000 A.D.***

The NPP was concerned with evaluating 'the impact of developmental plans and programmes on Indian women. It sought to review the policies and programs as they existed, plan documents as they had evolved and studies and reports that had been attempted.'<sup>47</sup> Further, it was an 'effort at a long term overall policy for Indian women, guided by those constitutional principles and directives relevant to the development process'.<sup>48</sup> The objectives of the plan were 'economic development, integration of women into mainstream of the economy and equity

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<sup>46</sup> *Gender and Governance- A country paper*, 2001, CWDS, New Delhi, p. 80

<sup>47</sup> *National Perspective Plan for Women 1988- 2000 A.D.*: Report of the Core group set up by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development, 1988. p. ix

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*



and social justice for all women<sup>49</sup>. The plan spoke of holistic development of Indian women by 2000AD. The endeavour of the plan was to harness 'the full potential of the *silent half* – comprising 331 million women and girls of India (about 150 million of them in material poverty and many more close to it)' <sup>50</sup>so that they could catch up with the mainstream by 2000 AD.

The chapter on rural development and agriculture lays emphasis on the various self-employment and income generation programmes launched from the Sixth Plan onwards. The NPP underscored the fact that agriculture and allied activities provided the largest sector for women's employment. It recognized that most of the otherwise productive work that women did in the agricultural sector went unrecognized because women were not paid for that work. In other words, inspite of doing bulk of the work, women get reduced to a non-working status. Further, both in the case of agriculture and animal husbandry, development strategies had provided little attention to women in comparison to their active involvement in both the sectors. The anti-poverty programmes and rural development programmes were to rectify this error. The NPP takes note of the fact that the policy directives and programmes intended to integrate women in development process had not had the desired result because the 'relevance of women's contribution to national development' had not been properly comprehended. 'the policy directives issued by the Government of India for the increased share for women in the development programmes and the promotion of a participatory

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

approach, do not provide for corresponding development in the infrastructure extension, training, information support and a strong monitoring system which is particularly lacking at the state level.<sup>51</sup> The major shortcomings found in the implementation of the programmes for women with development objectives were:

1. Perpetuation of the concept that women need only welfare services,
2. that the developmental benefits will automatically accrue to women as a result of economic development of the family,
3. inadequate knowledge and skills for designing socio- economic activities for women and in group organisations,
4. lack of supportive services such as credit, child care, marketing, training and technology for reducing the drudgery.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the basic approach of the plan is to move towards strengthening and more vigorously implementing the existing legislation and reorientation, where, benefits do not reach women and the need to 'empowerment' of women. The document does not take into account the criticisms that the Indian Women's Movement had been making of mainstream development, i.e., the manner in which the character, pace and direction of India's economic development is closely intermeshed with the process of women's oppression and the need to alter the thrust of the development process.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the NPP, for example talks of women's problems of getting water, fuel and fodder without

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>53</sup> While welcoming certain recommendations of the NPP, to give a perspective of women's movement on the Plan, a two – day debate was organized by various women's organizations. Refer to *National Perspective Plan for Women (1988- 2000)*, Report of a Debate, New Delhi, 22-23 April 1988

acknowledging the fact that this problem was caused directly by the increasing diversion of water, forest and other common land resources to commercial use. Similarly, though the plan notes the marginalisation of women in several of their traditional occupations and industries, it does not take into account that the trends in women's economic activities have been frequently altered and adjusted to suit the requirements of a developing economy. There are many contradictions and inconsistencies in the Plan's recommendations and analysis. The Plan frankly admits the failure and weak implementation of existing laws and policies and at places acknowledges the marginalisation of women resulting from macro-policies of the State. But this acknowledgement is not followed by a critique of the development process and mainstream government policies, which have created and reinforced marginalisation, dependency and oppression of women, and how to change the thrust of this process. Thus, if 'mainstream' policies of the State have resulted in subverting employment opportunities and participatory rights of women at various levels, how does the objective of the NPP to integrate women in such mainstream development process help alter women's conditions.

The Critique is leveled at the policy of implementation, which effectively suggests that there is nothing wrong with the articulation of laws and policies in operation for women. There is no recognition of the fact that as an active participant in the development process, the Indian state is responsible for such decisions that give priority to economic growth over distributive gender-based justice. In addition to this, as an instrument of the dominant groups in society, the State strives to

design its policies for women in a way that does not run counter to the prevailing values of these groups. In the context of women, these groups are mainly patriarchal and the gap between the preferred goals and the actual practice of the state machinery could be deliberate and not just an oversight.

A look at the way the Plan views women's roles in family suggest that it sees the woman primarily as a mother and carer of the family and the State support services are required to help her fulfill both the functions of the mother and a worker. The document frequently uses the term 'working mother' and the needs of workingwomen for child care services. It mentions that since more and more women are taking up employment, in the absence of traditional joint family system, 'the problem of working mothers has become increasingly serious'. This means that the State continues to rely on family to cope with a lot of functions like the care of children, the old, the sick and the disabled and the main burden of this are borne by women. The whole logic of State childcare also rests on the assumption that it is women's primary task to look after house and family. It is only when she takes up employment and needs to spend more hours outside the home that day care crèche etc. are needed. This is to facilitate her work but this definitely does not mean that she is acquitted of these basic responsibilities. The official ideology, which relegates this work to be done mainly by women cannot, in my opinion, help alleviate women's condition.

In addition to the above, the Plan is unwilling to acknowledge strong linkages between the economic and the social development sectors. For instance, the Plan suggests a division of responsibilities between the Women's Development Cells. This means a reversal of the role of CSWB, which was gradually moving away from a welfarist approach to women, again to a mere welfare agency.<sup>54</sup> Basically, despite asserting that it intended to provide a 'holistic' approach to women's issues, it continued with the 'basic needs approach'.

This gets amply reflected in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) document, which at the outset deviated from the practice of including separate chapter on 'Women and Development', a practice that was started by the Sixth Plan. The decade of the 80's saw the Indian State experimenting with poverty alleviation, wage and income generation programmes for women. It was realized that the status of women, their fertility, nutrition, health and the survival of their children, and many other development indicators are integrally linked with literacy and educational opportunities. On the other hand, access to health, education and participation in many other activities is constrained by social, cultural and economic factors. It was acknowledged that intervention in one or more sectors in an isolated manner does not yield the desired results. Towards the end of the Seventh plan, the language of development also began to use the notion of empowerment of women. The new approach extended the meaning of development to include, among other tangible benefits, bringing changes in social attitudes which obstruct the realization of empowerment of deprived

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<sup>54</sup> Critique made by the Women's movement

sections of women, through their active participation. Women could be empowered through education, information sharing and training so that they realize their collective strength. The new approach identified the instrumentality of empowering women through organizing them in groups, raising their level of awareness and providing them with social and economic support services. Thus the two concepts that dominated this approach were participation and empowerment. It is in this context that I move on to the next chapter that deals with Women's Development through Participation and Empowerment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GEARING UP FOR WOMEN'S 'EMPOWERMENT':

#### The Decade of the Nineties

The decade of the nineties has witnessed changes in the social, political and economic environment and there have been attempts to focus on the Human resource development and Planning for investment in human capital. This change was to be initiated by a better regulation, coordination and implementation of education, health, nutrition, training and capacity building. The goal of the empowerment of women has been cast in the language of increasing opportunities for women to be partners in decision making, by making women economically independent and by ushering in changes in society that would mitigate women's unequal position. The eighth and the Ninth Five Year Plans respectively have been the carriers of the notion of empowerment of women.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part examines the articulation of women's concerns in the Eighth Five Year Plan. The second section of the chapter analyses the country Report presented at the fourth World conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. The third section looks at the Ninth Plan and the defining goals of the Plan. The last section contains concluding remarks.

## PART ONE

### ***Eighth Five Year Plan 1992- 97***

The Eight Five-Year Plan includes concerns of women in the chapter on 'Social Welfare'. The plan does not suggest any reasons for doing so, but one can safely see this as an indicator of looking at women as recipients of State social welfare despite vocal pronouncements about shift of State approach from 'welfare' to 'development' and from 'development' to 'empowerment'. The plan is more or less silent on the intended approach towards women's development. Basically, human development was to be the main focus of the Eight Plan and it was towards this ultimate goal that employment generation, population control, literacy, education, health, drinking water and provision of adequate food and basic infrastructure were listed as the main priorities of the Eight Plan.<sup>1</sup> All these issues touch upon women's life in a significant way, and it is actually quite surprising that a specific and well-articulated approach towards women's development is missing in the Plan. Though this omission did not materially affect the financial outlays made for women's development in the Eight Plan, it certainly diluted the inter-sectoral co-ordination as well as gender sensitivity of the other development departments.<sup>2</sup>

'The Eight Plan was to move towards an 'innovative' approach to development, which is based on a *re-examination* and *reorientation* of the role of the Government; the harnessing of the latent energies of the people through people's involvement in the

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, *Eight Five Year Plan 1992-97*, Chapter 1-Objective and Orientation, Planning Commission, pp. 9-19

<sup>2</sup> *Ninth Five Year Plan, 1997-2001*, Report of the Working Group on Women's Development, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1996, p. 18



process of nation building and the creation of an environment which encourages and builds up people's initiative rather than their dependence on the Government and which sets free the forces of growth and modernisation. The State has to play more of a facilitating role and has to concentrate on protecting the interests of the poor and the underprivileged (my emphasis).<sup>3</sup>

It is in the context of this *innovative approach* that the concept of empowerment should be situated. The notion of integration of women in the development process had not quite had the effect that it was intended to have. The progress had suffered because 'development' had been viewed as a process where women were largely seen as recipients and beneficiaries. Such an approach did not contribute towards 'reducing the prevailing gender inequalities and oppressive conditions of women, mainly because it did not involve adequate effort to change attitudes towards oppressed sections of society while stressing on target fulfillment.'<sup>4</sup> Hence, it was contended that there ought to be a shift in focus from 'supply-oriented and target driven programmes to programmes which aims at raising the self image and confidence of women by sharing and providing knowledge and information and building their collective strength to raise and fight for issues affecting their lives.'<sup>5</sup> 'Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. Its parameters are – building a positive self image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action; ensuring equal

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<sup>3</sup> *Eight Five Year Plan, op. cit.*, p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Sadhna Arya, 2000, *Women, Gender equality and the State*, New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., p. 140

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

participation in the process of bringing about social change in society; providing the wherewithal for economic independence.<sup>6</sup> With this theoretical framework, three programmes were launched in the late 1980's. They were Women Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan in 1984, Awareness Generation Programme (AGP) in 1986 and Education for Women's Equality (EWE) or Mahila Samkhyā (MS) in 1989. These programmes continue well into the 1990's. Since these programmes were launched with much hype and hope, it is very surprising that the Eight Plan pays only so much as a lip service to the ideal/goal of empowerment. For instance, though the Plan said that '[A] more holistic view of women's role in the family and society would be conceived as opposed to the perception of a restricted role of motherhood and homemaker',<sup>7</sup> the emphasis really just remained on health of the mother,<sup>8</sup> use of education for family planning,<sup>9</sup> and of science and technology to 'reduce household drudgery'.<sup>10</sup>

The Plan did make a few notable new observations. It took note of the fact that there was under-reporting of women's contribution to economy and of conceptual, methodological and perceptual problems, reflecting gender bias, which did not assign any economic value to household work and various kinds of subsistence activities.<sup>11</sup> Further, it recognised that 'socio-cultural and administrative constraints to the realization of women's full potential need to be

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<sup>6</sup> Government of India, *National Plan for Education*, 1986, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi

<sup>7</sup> *Eighth Five Year Plan*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 15 – Social Welfare, p. 392

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 393

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 394

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 391

removed and there has to be greater societal awareness of their contribution to nation well being'.<sup>12</sup> The Plan contends that assigning 'subordinate role to women' is essentially a rural phenomenon. This observation of the State has long been falsified by the women's groups in the country. Further, it says 'women continue suffer because of ignorance of their legal rights, strong social resistance to giving women their due share, lack of legal aid facilities and near absence of strong women's groups in rural India'.<sup>13</sup> Changes in this regard could be brought about by 'ushering in changes in societal attitudes and perceptions in regard to the role of women in different spheres of life. This will be facilitated by the empowerment of women and will imply *adjustments in traditional gender specific performance of tasks*'<sup>14</sup> (emphasis mine). The Plan also recognised that approximately 30 per cent rural households were headed by women who bore the 'burden of earning and caring for the families and suffer on account of lack of access to means of production and ownership of land and other property'.<sup>15</sup>

However, the strategies that were suggested to achieve the above mentioned goals were again mired in service-oriented welfare approach. The three main areas identified for women were education, health and employment. The Plan stressed the need to extend '*services* (emphasis mine) for women under various programmes of employment, drinking water and nutrition'<sup>16</sup> to the grass-root levels in the form of a package through convergence and integration. Education

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 391

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 392

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* 391-92

for women has been viewed as a critical input for improving nutrition levels, raising the age at marriage, acceptance of family planning, improvement in self-image and their empowerment.<sup>17</sup> Part-time employment for women was also to be encouraged coupled also with the provision that '...relaxations, which will permit married women to leave the work-force and seek re-entry at a later date, would be necessary so that she can fulfill her child caring responsibilities and also her career ambitions.'<sup>18</sup> An approach of this kind to women's employment is surely not particularly sensitised to women's equality and empowerment. The Plan observes that the number of women in scientific professions is abysmally low, the reasons being 'such professions make a heavy demand on time and energy, which women find difficult to devote on account of their responsibilities at home. Having underscored this, the Plan does not so much as suggest how to rectify this imbalance. In other words, the planners were unwilling to challenge let alone change 'patriarchal norms that treat women basically as a flexible family resource rather than as a person with independent rights and priorities.'<sup>19</sup> The Plan actually left much of the responsibility of monitoring gender-related issues on the National commission of Women (NCW) and on women's groups.<sup>20</sup>

The Eight Plan period also saw the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. The theme of the Conference was **Equality, Development and Peace** to achieve the objectives laid down in Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 393

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 394

<sup>19</sup> Sadhna Arya, *op. cit.*, p. 172

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

for the advancement of women.<sup>21</sup> India presented a Country Report at the Conference and I think for the purposes of this dissertation, a look at the paper would be vital primarily because of the Indian State was taking a position on Indian women's concerns at an international forum.

## **PART TWO**

### **Country report presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995**

The country report contends that a concern for the 'rights and status of women' has always been central to Indian political thinking. There has always been a 'symbiotic and mutually complementary relationship between the Government, Women Movement and NGO'.<sup>22</sup> The Women's Movement in India continuously interacts with and influences public opinion and Government action. This is a *tribute* both to the maturity of thinking within the Government and the movement and to the *deep-rooted democratic tradition of this nation* <sup>23</sup>(emphasis mine). This is a factually incorrect contention because a symbiotic relationship between the Government and the contemporary women's movement has not been the order of the day. I have pointed out elsewhere, for example, that while drafting the NPP, the women's movement was not even consulted and it actually organised a

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<sup>21</sup> Some of the main Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies were elimination of illiteracy, women's education and training, economic security and autonomy, basic health care and services, women's rights to control their own fertility, women and men to share caring of home and children and women equality in decision making.

<sup>22</sup> Government of India, 1995, *Country Report: Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing. Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development. p.4

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

two-day seminar to put forward its criticisms of the draft plan and gave its recommendations. Further, there has always existed a rather contentious relationship with the State in the area of legal reform and implementation of laws. The women's movement has consistently suggested reforms in law which the State has conveniently ignored or just sat over. At best, the relationship has been of bargaining, where the women's movement has been able to successfully pressurize the State into seriously looking at concerns of women and ensuring that they be treated as equal citizens of the State. Six years after this paper was presented at Beijing, the Indian State came out with a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women and did not consult the women's movement before drafting it.

The Report highlights the 'inadequacy of institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, persistent and institutionalised discrimination against the girl child, feminization of poverty, gender blindness in macro-economic policies, invisibility of women's contribution to the economy and environmental sustenance, poor participants of women in decision making structures and processes, gender gaps in literacy, education and health, growing trends of violence against women, barriers encountered by women in accessing legal entitlements, gender bias in societal norms, negative portrayal and perpetuation of gender stereotypes by mass media'<sup>25</sup> as concerns in need of attention. Further, these concerns can be addressed only by re-drawing the development plan by 'streamlining women's perspectives....For women to be truly empowered,

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

it is necessary to provide an expanding network of services so that they are freed from some of their *gender related shackles of a practical nature* and are also enabled to aspire to the actualization of their *strategic gender needs*'. (emphasis mine).

In the specific context of the Indian situation, one sees a plethora of policy initiatives, spanning more than half a century, aimed at radically altering women's position, but only piecemeal changes take place on the ground. For instance, there is no dearth of negative portrayal and perpetuation of gender stereotypes by mass media of women. Except in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies and that too after the 73 and the 74 Amendments, women's visibility in decision making bodies is abysmally low. The Women's Reservation Bill has been shelved yet again in the year 2003. The HRD ministry has routinely undermined the autonomy of the NCW which was established through an Act of Parliament. A memorandum issued by the HRD ministry on September 20, 2002 suggests that in financial matters, the NCW has to consult the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of HRD. This is in contrast to the NCW Act, 1990 which protects the financial autonomy of the Commission.<sup>26</sup> The NCW was not consulted when the government formulated a National Policy on Women, or for that matter related schemes in the budget. As far as legal safeguards for women are concerned, the government did not consult the NCW on the Domestic Violence Bill, which many women's groups in the country

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<sup>26</sup> Brinda Karat, 2002, 'A Changed Commission : The National Commission of Women', *Times of India*, November 13

actually take to be a sanction for domestic violence.<sup>27</sup> What I am trying to suggest here is that the State's efforts have always fallen short of its intended policy statements. Whether it is lack of proper implementation of policies/ programs on ground, or theoretical incoherence on the State's part, or deliberately undermining the autonomy of institutions, or just plain inaction, all these have worked in the Indian situation and the net result has been that the problems that existed half a decade ago show no sign of getting resolved in the near future.

The Country Report blames women to a considerable degree for their own situation. It contends, 'many women themselves are often brow beaten into insensitivity and unquestioned submission to biases and discriminations which they end up viewing as socially ordained and irrevocable. As for men, they go around blind, seeing and yet not seeing anything. It is this ideology of patriarchy and the accompanying culture of silence that need to be challenged and broken if development is to touch the lives of women.'<sup>28</sup> This is one of the most ludicrous ways in which a country report could have analysed women's subordinate status in society and not only does it reek of government inertia to look deeply into problems that run deep, it also tells us why there has been no substantial improvement in women's condition. A substantial improvement was perhaps never the aim, never mind the rhetoric; otherwise nothing stopped the State from

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Country Report, *op. cit.*, p. 45



analysing problems in the best possible manner to reach the best possible solutions.

For feminization of poverty, the Report blames international economic order; for negative portrayal of women in mass media, the globalisation of mass media is blamed<sup>29</sup>; for women in extreme poverty, policies and programs would be re-designed (at some future unspecified date) to have a better understanding of the characteristics of women in poverty and the processes that lead to intensification of poverty.<sup>30</sup> The report would have us believe an assessment of Structural Adjustment Program's (SAP) impact is difficult to analyse since policies are still unfolding. This contention is completely untrue because even way back in 1993-94, there were enough studies on the impact of SAPs on women in India. Moreover, it says that 'the complexity of assessment is further compounded by a multiplicity of women's roles in any society. A woman is an economic producer, home manager, child bearer, care taker of children and elderly.'<sup>31</sup> Just how all this makes assessment difficult is not explained, plus no effort is really made to undo the perpetuation of stereotypical roles of women.

In the area of women in decision making, the Report suggests that women's empowerment and participation is a political question linked to changes in power relations.<sup>32</sup> Beyond this, the analysis, yet again, goes haywire. For instance, the

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 44-45

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66

analysis is mired with sentences like, 'recently, movements seeking a political identity based on caste, ethnicity, culture and religion have surfaced. Such movements view the empowerment of women as somewhat a threat to their vision of a social order'.<sup>33</sup> Indian politics always had these factors playing their role. Caste for instance, has been a quintessential part of Indian politics. Till the 90s, Indian politics was largely dominated by the upper castes and it is only in the 90s that one sees the rise of 'Bahujan politics' that has, in its own way created a niche for itself and challenged the domination of upper caste politics. This is not to suggest that factors such as caste, religion, ethnicity, etc. do not play a role in perpetuating gender inequality, but only that women's representation in decision making bodies is low because the State did not take adequate steps to make decision making bodies more representative.

The section on health speaks of the National Family Planning Program and the specific ways in which it apparently sought to give women control over their bodies. Of course, the contention is that the program has always been voluntary.<sup>34</sup> That excesses on people's bodies have been committed in this country is a familiar story that does not require repetition. There is also a mention of problems and health hazards faced by women in the unorganized sector, but absolutely nothing is suggested to deal with those problems.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86-88

The all important section on violence against women, the concern on which women's movement has and continues to spend a considerable amount of energy, only tells us of the same causes like increasing criminalisation of society, media images of violence, inferior status of women in a male dominated society, poor enforcement of legal provisions, unabashed consumerism, erosion of traditional values, etc. that result in violence against women.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, it also adds terrorism, aided and abetted from across the border in Jammu and Kashmir to the list of violence. It forgets to mention the atrocities the Indian army has inflicted on the civilians in the area. It does say that the laws of the country might be lacking in any respect whatsoever.

Overall, the Report ends by suggesting societal reorientation of sorts. It analyses women's unequal position using Marxist terms rather poorly. In other words, 'the economic, social interests and unequal power relations have a material base which makes them all the more intractable and resistant to change'.<sup>36</sup> Family is identified as a 'primary problematic area of subordination'.<sup>37</sup> However, unlike the Marxist prescription, no revolutionary change is envisaged for the Indian society and the Indian Country Report ends by suggesting that a 'radical change in all existing structures and institutions for a gender just society'.<sup>38</sup> It goes without my mentioning that no one has even an iota of a clue as to how any radical change would be brought about.

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100-101

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 116

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

## PART THREE

### *Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2001*

In a major shift from the Eight Five Year Plan, the Ninth Five Year Plan included a separate chapter on 'Empowerment of Women' but also clubbed it with 'Development of Children'. 'Empowerment of Women's is stated as one of the nine primary objectives of the Ninth Plan and the Plan proclaimed that 'every effort would be made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men.'<sup>39</sup> Health, education, training and employment continue to be major areas the State lays emphasis on. The Ninth Plan recognizes the special health needs of women and the girl child and the importance of enhancing easy access to primary health care. 'Taking into account their multiple roles in including the physical labour that women in the lower strata of the society living in the backward rural areas and urban slums have to carry on, efforts will be made to ensure that the health services become more responsive towards women-specific health problems.'<sup>40</sup> Though the Plan mentions that special attention will be paid to occupational health hazards, it fails to elaborate on what kind of initiative would be made in this regard.

Having put emphasis on education as the most powerful instrument for empowering women, efforts in the Ninth Plan were to be directed towards target-

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<sup>39</sup> Government of India, *Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2001*, Section 2.8- Emphasis on Women and Development of Children Planning Commission, p. 321

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 322

oriented approach of fulfilling the goal of 'Education for Women's Equality' as laid down in National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPE), revised in 1992.<sup>41</sup> The Ninth Plan also spoke of initiating steps to eliminate gender discrimination in the admissions, remove gender bias and stereotypes in the curricula, textbooks and learning material, create a gender-sensitive educational system, promote gender sensitization of teachers on a regular basis...<sup>42</sup>

The Plan takes note of the fact that there is a need for 'Gender Sensitization of 1991 Census' to capture women's work in the informal sector in a more substantial way in the Census of 2001. Hence, a need to redefine the concept of work was emphasized upon.<sup>43</sup> Also, women in the Informal Sector accounting for more than 90 per cent were to be extended labour legislations like laws relating to both minimum and equal pay for equal work. It is surprising if not disheartening that the India State has since the Second Plan emphasised on this goal and at the end of the Ninth Plan period, the laws still remains largely unimplemented. The Plan further suggests that 'to increase the share of women in factories and industrial establishments, efforts will be made to remove the existing traditional bias that women are good only in stereotypical feminine jobs and encourage women to equip themselves with necessary vocational/professional skills and compete with men to make an entry into such areas.'<sup>44</sup> The Plan does not throw

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 324

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 325

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 326

light on the kind of efforts that would be made to remove traditional, stereotypical biases.

The Ninth Plan lays great emphasis on the representation of women in the decision-making levels since it is contended, it has a 'direct bearing on all the affirmative actions directed towards their well-being and empowerment'.<sup>45</sup> Hence, efforts were to be made to expedite action to legislate reservations of not less than one-third of the total seats for women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. The Year is 2003 and the Women's Reservation Bill has been shelved again. Further, economic empowerment of women, the Plan held, is mainly related to their participation in decision-making with regard to raising and distribution of resources, i.e., income, investments and expenditures at all levels, special efforts will be made to enhance their capacity to earn besides enlarging their access to and control/ownership of family/community assets. With access to economic assets, women will be encouraged to take up self-employment through various entrepreneurial ventures, which are *more convenient and allow them to play their dual role, within and outside home, effectively* (emphasis mine).<sup>46</sup> In other words, the State continues to promote women's role in the household and enlargement of access and control of assets is advocated so that they can do what they, in the State's view, do best, i.e., be mothers and home makers.

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 327

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

Women are also viewed as critical to the process of moving their families out of poverty and hence policies and programmes of poverty alleviation were to be redesigned to make them more responsive to the special needs of women in abject/ extreme poverty. Arya points out that this kind of strategy really just makes poor women targets of State policy as efficient economic actors, whose efficiency could be further improved by increasing their access to education, skill, training, technology, credit etc., and that this hides the exploitative aspect of women's labour both inside and outside their homes that they do to make scarce resources stretch further in the present deteriorating economic and social conditions.<sup>47</sup>

The Ninth Plan document is still an advance over the earlier documents in the sense that it does emphasise on greater gender equality in all respects, in its insistence on changing the mind-set and behavioural patterns at the level of community and society, in its emphasis on women's participation in decision-making bodies, in challenging gender biases and stereotypes, though it falls short of arriving at a coherent theory of women's oppression in society. In other words, it does not ground the questions of women's inequality in the politics of patriarchal norms.

The Plan takes note of the increasing problem of violence against women and the girl child within and outside the family and speaks of the adoption of a comprehensive approach to deal with violence. This approach was to be adopted

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<sup>47</sup> Sadhna Arya, *op.cit.*, p. 74

through a 'review of all the existing women-specific legislations and remove the weak links through necessary amendments; gender sensitisation of the enforcement machinery to be prompt and strict in handling the perpetrators of such violence, involvement of community and voluntary organisations to act as the informants; and rehabilitation of and compensation for, the victims of such violence.<sup>48</sup> Setting up/ strengthening of Women's Cells in the approved Police Stations, family courts, mahila courts, counseling centers, legal aid centers and nyaya panchayats were to be set up as part of the intensive efforts to curb violence against women.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, all the above mentioned measures are not preventive in nature and come into operation after the acts of violence have been perpetrated. Besides, violence against women cannot be mitigated unless patriarchal structures from where violence emanates are re-examined and re-structured radically. The decade of the 90's saw the setting up of a National Commission of Women.

Though the Ninth Plan is an advance over earlier documents that theorized concerns of women, it does not address questions of unequal power relations in the household and market, sexual divisions of labour, sex-segregation in markets, etc. and without questions like these and attempting a radical overhaul of the society we live in, empowerment of women would remain a theoretically incoherent ideal which would obviously fall short of its intended goal.

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<sup>48</sup> *Eighth Five Year Plan, op.cit.*, p. 328

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 329



## **PART FOUR**

### ***Conclusion***

The emphasis in the nineties has been on empowerment of women and continues to be a dominant theme well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, That economic growth *per se* does not guarantee gender equality nor the reduction of poverty particularly among the marginalized groups, is a dynamic that is well theorized in the critique of earlier development strategies that looked at women either as merely a category of people perpetually in need of welfare services, or in 'Women in Development' approach. Unequal class, caste and gender relation determine access to social and economic opportunities. The eighth and the ninth Plan do take note of such indicators, but fall short of operationalising the 'innovative' approach to development that was set out in the Eighth Plan. For instance, *the harnessing of the latent energies of the people through people's involvement in the process of nation building*, a goal set forth by the Eighth Plan, would require women's participation in decision making bodies, but the ground reality is far from this. Elsewhere in the chapter I have mentioned that the Women's Reservation Bill has been shelved again in 2003.

Both the plans look into the issue of violence against women, but no measure is put in place to prevent growing incidences of violence. The goal of empowerment for women also necessitated that women have greater economic independence. But not only has introduction of SAP shrunk chances of women's employment,

they have also got consistently concentrated in the unorganized sector which lacks labour legislation. A policy that envisages economic independence for women as a goal cannot go without effecting legislation that would guarantee a healthy and equal work environment for women. However, no such program is envisaged. The Equal Pay for Equal Work is a goal long enshrined in the plans of the Indian Nation State, but wage differentials among women and men continue unabated.

The goal of empowerment is further articulated in a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, the idea of which is envisaged in the Ninth Five Year Plan period, but the Policy is released only in the year 2001. The next chapter deals with the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women and analyses where the agenda of Women's empowerment is headed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

#### Rhetoric vs. Reality

The year 2001 was declared as the Year of Women's Empowerment. A National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPE) was released, four years after it was declared that such a policy would be institutionalised. The policy speaks of 'advancement, development and empowerment of women as its goals. A Committee for the Empowerment of Women (CEW) was also set up prior to the formulation of the policy. This Committee released 13 reports on issues of vital importance for women in the period between 2000-03. The focus of this chapter would be the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women and some of the reports that were laid down in the Parliament by Committee for the Empowerment of Women.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section attempts an analysis of the NPE. The second section looks at eleven of the thirteen reports placed in the Parliament by the Committee. The First, Seventh and the Eighth Reports deal with overlapping issues of 'Development Schemes for Rural Women', Training Programmes for Women' and 'Training and Employment of Women in Local Bodies' respectively. The Second and the Tenth Reports engage with the subject of the 'Functioning of National and State Commission for Women' and have been

analysed together. The Fourth and the Thirteenth reports deal with the concerns of 'Health and Family Welfare Programmes for Women' and have also been analysed together. The Fifth and the Twelfth Report examine the 'Functioning of Family Courts' and have been put together as well. The Third and the Eleventh Reports analyse the issue of 'Women in Detention' and as such do not fall directly within the purview of this dissertation and hence have not been included. The third section contains concluding remarks.

## **PART ONE**

### ***National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001***

The NPE's avowed goal has been 'advancement, development and empowerment' of women. The first objective of the NPE is 'creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for *full development of women* to enable them to realize their *full potential*'<sup>1</sup>(emphasis mine). There are eight other objectives that are generic, idealistic policy goals that the Indian State has been striving to achieve since post-independence in some form or the other. These include, women's access to health care, quality education at all levels, equal access to participation and decision-making in *social, political and economic life of the nation* (my emphasis), *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom, strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, changing societal

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001*, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, paragraph 1.1.

attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both women and men, *mainstreaming a gender perspective on the development process* (my emphasis), elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and interestingly, building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations.<sup>2</sup>

In operationalising the policy, it has been recommended that 'all Central and State Ministries draw up time bound Action Plans for translating the Policy into a set of concrete actions, through a participatory process of consultation with Centre/State Departments of Women and Child Development and National/ State Commissions for Women.'<sup>3</sup> Further, measurable goals to be achieved by 2010 are to be set up with identification and commitment of resources. Also, gender disaggregated data by all primary data collecting agencies of the Central and State as well as research and Academic Institutions in the Public and Private Sectors is to be undertaken. These operationalising strategies speak of the Indian State's attempting to make itself more gender sensitive than it had ever been in the past. To that extent, the NPE is quite a refreshing document in so far as it states that the personnel of executive, legislative and judicial wings of the State need to be trained and sensitised to women's concerns. The policy also aims to implement international obligations/ commitments in all sectors on empowerment of women such as the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 1.11

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 10.1

Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+5), etc.<sup>4</sup>

Looking specifically at the goals and objectives of the policy, it is suggested, in the section on legal and judicial systems, that the same would be made 'more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault'.<sup>5</sup> This bill, called the Domestic Violence Bill prepared by the Government of India has come under a lot of criticism by women's groups in the country. The charge against the government has been that it did not take the recommendations of the women's groups in the country into account while drafting the bill. Further, the policy contends that 'at the initiative of and with the full participation of *all stake holders including community and religious leaders*, the Policy would aim to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship to eliminate discrimination against women<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added). This particular policy initiative comes in the wake of India having presented its First Report to CEDAW at the UN in September 2000. In the Report, India has maintained that though it would work towards the elimination of all discrimination against women, in matters relating to marriage and family relations, the same would have to be in 'conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 17.1

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 2.1

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 6.22

community without its initiative and consent.<sup>7</sup> No such initiative was made in the Ninth Plan period. Specific communities, religious, caste-groups and class structures in which women are located work in ways that are oppressive, exploitative and discriminatory in nature. A reform in personal laws would invariably mean that these structures be challenged and re-structured. The State cannot so much as hope to bring about changes in personal laws if, at the same time, it also holds that it would not 'interfere' in the personal affairs of any community. Also, when the State locates women primarily in their caste/community religious spaces, and sites confrontation with community leaders as a reason to not make about gender just laws, it ends up compromising on the Constitutional rights of women. The Policy speaks of 'building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations'.<sup>9</sup> It is only ironic that this policy was drafted without any meaningful consultation with any of the women's organisations. The NPE suggests mainstreaming of a Gender Perspective in the Development Process. This provision seems to suggest that all that is lacking in the development process is a Gender Perspective and the moment additions are made in terms of gender sensitive policy packages, development process would have become non-discriminatory. The Women's movement in India has critiqued the development process *per se* and for persistently defining women in relation to men, using and making labour grid, perpetuating invisibility of domestic labour, governed both land relations and distribution of resources, enforcing rule of property in ways specially unjust to

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<sup>7</sup> CEDAW, *India's First Report*, 2000, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> *The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*, op.cit., paragraph 1.11

women, creating class and gender inequalities through 'development', reproduced women's economic dependence, co-opting many women's initiatives and in recent times, withdrawing from its welfarist functions.<sup>10</sup>

The Policy also does throw light on what has been achieved in the sphere of women's development. Since the Policy lacks a historical analysis, parts of it do sound like replicas of Policy documents of the past. For instance, the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, aimed at a 'holistic development' of women by the year 2000, but the same goals have now been pushed to 2010. The Policy also contradicts itself in places. For instance, it suggests that economic empowerment of women is sought to be achieved by 'designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies,<sup>11</sup> but elsewhere, the document declares only 'improved implementations of programmes which are already women-oriented with special targets for women'<sup>12</sup> would do the job. It talks of offering peasant women training and extension of support, but it is silent on legal rights to land and resources. It speaks of new labour legislations, social security and support services for women as industrial workers, when at the same time, under the impact of Globalisation, the State has consistently withdrawn support and welfare services.

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<sup>10</sup> KumKum Sangari, (1995), 'Politics of Diversity: Religious Community and Multiple Patriarchies', *Economic and political Weekly*, vol. 30, nos. 51 and 52, pp. 3287- 310, 3381- 89

<sup>11</sup> *The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*, *op.cit.*, paragraph 5.3

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 5.1



The section on Globalisation contends that the process has presented new challenges for the realisation of the goal of women's equality. It recognises that globalisation has led to greater economic disparities, feminisation of poverty, increased gendered inequality through deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment, especially in the informal economy and rural areas. To deal with this, it suggests that 'strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts of globalisation.'<sup>13</sup> Having first realised that negative impacts do flow from globalisation, the Policy should actually have suggested definite measures like implementing rights of women as workers, labour laws, reforming land relations and distribution of resources, reformed unjust property laws, etc, but it dwells on no such measures. Significantly, the paragraphs on agriculture, industry, the economy, health, environment, technology, etc., do not refer to the adverse impact of new policies of globalisation.

Social empowerment of women includes education, health, nutrition, housing and shelter, etc. In the section on health, it is suggested that 'the social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases will be tackled from a gender perspective.'<sup>14</sup> Further, in the section on health only, it is held that registration of marriages would be made compulsory. No measure of this kind has come through yet.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 5.4

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 6.2

It is interesting to see how the Indian State understands the 'diversity of women's situation'. Among women, there are 'specially disadvantaged groups' that deserve 'special assistance'.<sup>15</sup> These include women in extreme poverty, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in *difficult circumstances*, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, victims of marital violence, deserted women and prostitutes, etc.<sup>16</sup> Special assistance, which is not specified, is to be provided to women in above mentioned circumstances. The Policy does not speak of the violation of the rights of such women; only that they need *special attention*. Being situated in multiple situations, factors like caste, community and religion also have an impact on women's situation; these identities and how they affect women's status do not fall within the purview of the Policy.

The Policy commits itself to eliminating violence, physical and mental, domestic or societal, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices. It is commendable that the Policy recognises that women become victims of violence that arises out of customs and traditions, but what it does not say is that elimination of such violence would necessarily involve 'interference' of a certain kind within the personal affairs of communities. The Indian State cannot say that it would work towards bringing about intra-group equality and not, at the same time interfere in those affairs of communities disguised as 'personal affairs'.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, paragraph 6.12

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

There is a contradiction in the State's approach towards dealing with the issue of violence against women.

The Center for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) Country Paper on Governance points out that the NPE does not include admission on the State's part that its own policies and actions could have contributed to the failure of the constitutional provisions. Further, the paper critiques the Policy for lacking in a unifying conceptual framework relating to the goals of human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>17</sup>

Since the NPE for women is the very first attempt by the Government of India after independence, it should have included a historical analysis of the situation of Indian women. Overall, the NPE really just extends the goal of a holistic development and empowerment of women to be achieved by 2010.

## **PART TWO**

### ***Reports of the Committee of Women's Empowerment***

In the period between 2000-2003, the Committee on Empowerment of Women tabled some 13 reports on various concerns of women in Parliament. These Reports make an interesting study because they point out the lacunae in the State's initiative and policies to empower women. They also highlight the gap

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<sup>17</sup> *Gender and Governance- A Country Paper*, Center for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi: CWDS, p. 103.

between the State rhetoric on women's empowerment and how the empowerment initiative is working on the field. Besides, since NPE, 2001 was the first such policy the Indian State came out with. These reports should be looked at as documents that given an insight into the actual working of nodal bodies like the Department of Women and Child Development.

The First Report of the Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2000-01 is on Developmental Schemes for Rural Women. The Department of Rural Development of the Ministry of Rural Department of Women and Child Development of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) jointly started these schemes. In the developmental schemes like the Integrated Rural Development Program, Indira Awaas Yojana, National Maternity Benefit Scheme, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, etc., examined by the Committee, it was noted that deficiencies like 'lack of awareness amongst the beneficiaries, a plethora of schemes and multiplicity of agencies, inadequate training facilities, lack of co-ordination between the Central government and the Central Ministries *inter se*, faulty system of reports and returns, inadequate marketing facilities, overlapping jurisdiction and siphoning off and diversion of funds, etc.,<sup>18</sup> were rampant and these diluted the very aim of the programs.

The Report points out that the intermingling of Central and State policies had an adverse impact on individual schemes. The 'parallel running of schemes lead to

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<sup>18</sup> First Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2000-01, *Developmental Schemes for Rural Women Ministry, of Rural Development (Department of Rural Development) and Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Women and Child DevelopmentCD), Lok Sabha Secretariat, p. 2*

the creation of unnecessary infrastructure, increase in work load, consequent delays and slippage.<sup>19</sup>

The Report pointed out that in schemes like the IRDP, the percentage of women out of total beneficiaries was to be 40 per cent, but between 1995-2000, the percentage had not gone beyond 31 per cent. Also, the total credit disbursed under IRDP was also about 31 per cent. The Report underscores that the 'explanation of the Department of Rural Development that the predominant activities of rural women were agriculture and allied activities which do not have a viable bankability were also not based on facts since most of the rural women involved in the agricultural sector were landless labour who would be happy to start any other income generation/ asset creating activity at the very first opportunity'.<sup>20</sup>

Further, the Report highlighted that in some states, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, average wages per day paid to female unskilled workers was less than what was paid to male unskilled workers. The Report accused the Department of Rural Development<sup>22</sup> for remaining silent under the pretext of bringing the provision of already existing Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.<sup>21</sup> Indira Awaas Yojana is a scheme that endeavours to provide dwelling units free of cost

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15

to the families who were shelter less and living below the poverty lines. The Report points out that though the allotment of houses should be in the name of the female member of the beneficiary householder, there were reports of registration of houses being done in the name of husbands. Further, when asked by the Committee about the number of houses constructed for households headed by widows and unmarried women, the Department of Rural Development did not reply back to the Committee. The scheme laid down that the beneficiaries be involved in the construction of the house and try to make their own arrangements for construction material, engage workmen and also contribute family labour<sup>23</sup>. If the beneficiaries of this scheme were to be poorest of poor, how could the State even so much as think that they would know and would be able to arrange for quality construction of their houses? In effect, this just meant that the implementing agencies of the scheme were really not concerned about the fundamentals of the policy and remained distant and shirked off their responsibilities.

The Seventh and the Eighth reports also deal with similar issues. The Seventh Report deals with Training Programmes for Women initiated jointly by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of HRD, Department of Women and Child Development. The Eighth Report's concern is with Training and Empowerment of Women in Local Bodies and the Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development and Ministry of Urban Development launched these

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

programmes. I will look at the Eighth Report first because it falls in line with developmental schemes for rural women mentioned above.

The Report states that though reservations for women in Rural and Urban local bodies to increase political participation in decision making bodies, they 'seem to be reluctant to come forward and take initiatives'.<sup>24</sup> The lack of awareness among women about their role and responsibilities and their ineffective participation has been attributed to lack of education, purdah system, non-availability of honorarium and conveyance allowance for attending meetings, etc. The Report accused the Department of Rural Development for not formulating any specific strategy for women's effective participation in Panchayats. Besides, whatever little training institutions do exist, were found to be lacking in infrastructure and staff, the programmes were not based on any scientific assessment of training needs but on the perception of the training faculty. Also, evaluation and follow up about the impact of the learning was not considered by training institutions.<sup>25</sup> Economic dependence of women on their husbands or other members of their family also contributed to effective participation or no participation at all. The Report suggested that a 'massive program of home based employment for women both in rural as well as urban areas, with quality control system and marketing approach be put in place'.<sup>26</sup> I have pointed out

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<sup>24</sup> Eighth Report, Committee on the Empowerment of Women, 2002-03, *Training and Empowerment of Women in Local Bodies*, Ministry of Rural Development (Department of Rural Development) and Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation (Department of Urban Affairs), Lok Sabha Secretariat, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24

elsewhere in the chapter that the self-employment programmes launched by the State have fallen short of their intended goals. For the Committee Report to recommend more programmes of the similar type sounds a bit jarring. Further, though independent studies by research organisations and universities on the working of PRI are many, the Report brings to light the fact that neither the Department of Rural Development nor the Department of Urban Development has conducted studies on the impact of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments even after their being in operation for a good ten years.<sup>27</sup>

The Seventh Report of the Committee on Training Programmes for Women also lays emphasis on the connection between the status of women and their economic position. Participation of women in the work force, the Report suggests, is an important element in the adoption of the small family norms, essential for the achievement of the twin goals of economic development and population planning. The stress in this Report is on creating adequate vocational education and training opportunities for women. The Report critiques the Government for concentrating mainly on urban and semi-urban areas when instituting vocational studies institutes.<sup>28</sup> Besides, it is pointed out that while the numbers of women who have received training has increased in absolute numbers, the percentage increase in the number of trained female as compared to the males has remained almost stagnant. The Committee Report points out deficiencies in the vocational studies schemes. These include- lack of proper

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>28</sup> Seventh Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2001-02, *Training Programmes for Women*, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Human Resource Development, Lok Sabha Secretariat, p. 27.



infrastructural facilities, need for more vocational institutions and to update the existing ones, lack of adequate teachers, outdated courses that do not meet the demands of the job market, etc.<sup>30</sup> It is quite surprising that despite the fact that infrastructural facilities were found to be lacking, the funds sanctioned by the Ministry of Labour to Women's Vocational Training Centres remained underutilised. The Training Centres were unable to explain why existing facilities had not been improved upon even when funds were available. The Report laid stress on schemes like Distance Education for Women's Development and Empowerment, Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) and Training-cum-Employment-cum-Production Centres (NORAD). The Report took into account that these programmes had helped raise substantially the level of awareness of women, but the monitoring mechanism have to be strengthened to ensure that the targeted women are benefited and the resources are properly utilised. The Report underscores the fact that the Training Programmes for Women in India have suffered because they have not been seriously implemented.

The Second and the Tenth Reports of the Committee deal with the Functioning of National and State Commissions for women. The Department of Women and Child Development is the nodal Department for the National Commission for Women, which was set up in 1992 as an autonomous body. A number of State Commissions also were set up in the post-1992 period.

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28

The functions of the National Commission for Women cover a wide range of issues, empowering the Commission to:-

- investigate and examine the legal safeguards provided to for women under the Constitution and other laws and recommend to the Government, measures for their effective implementation.
- Review the existing provisions of the Constitution and other laws affecting women and recommend amendments to meet any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings in such laws.
- Look into complaints and take *suo moto* notice of matters relating to deprivation of women's rights, etc., and take up the issues with the appropriate authorities.
- Take up studies/ research, etc., on socio-economic issues.
- Participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of women and evaluate the progress made.
- Inspect jails, remand homes, etc., where women are kept under custody and seek remedial action where necessary.<sup>31</sup>
- The Central Government has to consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting women.

In assessing the financial performance of the Commission, the Reports found out that sufficient funds are allocated, but the process of actual release of funds is not timely and being in a piecemeal fashion, does hamper the Commission's

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<sup>31</sup> Second Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, *Functioning of National and State Commissions for Women*, Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Women and child Development), Lok Sabha Secretariat, pp. 3-4

efforts to work in a planned structured manner.<sup>32</sup> The Commission is required to present its annual reports to the Parliament. The last Annual Report of the Commission that was laid in the Parliament pertains to the year 1996-97. The delay has been attributed to the lack of qualified staff support and infrastructural facilities in the NCW and to take the time taken by the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD). If the Annual Reports of the Commission are not laid in Parliament this time, the very purpose of their laying is defeated.<sup>33</sup> Further, the NCW has reviewed 23 Acts that have a direct bearing on women since its inception and has forwarded the recommendations for their amendments to the Department of WCD. According to the NCW, the Government is not showing urgency that the amendments of the Acts deserve.<sup>34</sup> The Reports also critiques the ad-hocism in the appointment of the Chairperson and members of the Commission. Further, as per Section 16 of the National Commission for Women's Act, the Central Government is to consult the Commission on all major policies affecting women. But, the Reports point out that in actual practice the Commission is rarely consulted.<sup>35</sup> The Reports also noted that many State Commissions for Women have not been able to function properly for want of adequate powers, status, funds and infrastructure facilities.

The Fifth and the Twelfth Report deal with the Functioning of Family Courts and this comes under the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs. The Family

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24

Courts Act, 1984 was enacted with a view to promote conciliation and secure speedy settlement of disputes relating to marriage and family affairs. The Act was passed in response to the demands of women's organisations that decried the substitution of the traditional, formal, adversarial system of solving disputes by an informal and humane system with a different approach, and a different atmosphere and the replacement of adjudication by fair and dignified reconciliation and settlement.<sup>36</sup> It was also supposed to remove the gender bias in statutory legislation. These courts aimed at securing the legal rights of the individuals on the one hand while performing the role of guide, helper and counselor on the other.<sup>37</sup> The basic concept of family courts emerged from the conviction that the family being a social institution, disputes connected with family breakdown, divorce, maintenance, custody of children etc. needs to be viewed from the *social rather than the legal perspective* (emphasis mine).<sup>38</sup>

The establishment of family courts under the Family Courts Act, 1984, is the responsibility of the state governments. The Reports point out that 17 years after the enactment of the Act, only 84 family courts have been set up in 17 states and one Union Territory. Reasons advanced by the states for non-establishment of family courts such as cities not having requisite population of one million, insufficient number of matrimonial cases, lack of financial resources, prevalence of customary courts dealing with matrimonial case, etc. The Reports suggest that

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<sup>36</sup> Fifth Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, (2001-2002), *Functioning of Family Courts*, Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs (Department of Justice), p. 19

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

the primary reason for family courts not being set up in some states really is the stiff resistance from the lawyer's lobby.<sup>39</sup> The Family Court Act advocates that preference should be given to women as Family Court Judges. The Committee Report pointed out that this provision has not been adhered to. Filling up an institution like Family Courts with women judges is not going to make the institutions any more gender sensitive that they have been. In other words, there are socially constructed meanings of what 'matrimonial disputes' are. For instance, matrimonial disputes involve rights of individuals and hence a legal perspective. The objectives of family courts need not have mentioned social perspective over the legal perspective. The idea really should be an integration of both the perspectives and grounding matrimonial disputes in the politics of unequal sexual relationship between partners. Further, the provision mandating that family courts be filled by largely women judges essentialises the relationship between women. The language of laws and courts work with gender biases implicit in the very definitions of laws. Family Courts, for instance, do not work with laws that are gender sensitive. In other words, operation of laws that have been found violative of women's rights are not going to work any better in an institution like family courts, 'manned' by women's judges. Without a theoretical understanding of the ways in which women are oppressed, all judges, women or men, are likely to endorse a position that sees matrimonial disputes as issues that can largely be solved with counseling.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

The role of Counselors has been given a lot of importance in the Reports. However, it is quite surprising that some states have not appointed any, and there is also no uniformity amongst the states in regard to qualification, tenure, method of appointment and remuneration paid to the Counsellors.<sup>40</sup> The whole purpose of appointing Counselors gets defeated if qualified counselors are not appointed. The Reports have directed the Department of Justice to assess the effectiveness of the Act, point out limitations and suggest changes and modifications. The Twelfth Report expresses dissatisfaction with the Department of Justice and accuses it of not ensuring proper implementation of the Family Courts Act, whether it is about the setting up of family courts, provision of proper infrastructure, appointment of Counselors or the appearance of lawyers.<sup>41</sup> The Report accuses the Department of furnishing stock replies to all recommendations of the Committee Report, of absolving themselves of the responsibility and shifting it to the National Commission of Women.

The Sixth Report of the Committee deals with Education Programmes for Women. The Report brings attention to the fact that the goal of universalising elementary education has not been achieved till the present date. The Report expresses concern over the Lower Gross Enrolment Ratio and higher drop out rates among girls especially as compared to those in respect to boys. The Committee suggests that 'the economic and social returns for education of women are, on the whole, greater than those of men. Education empowers girls

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* p. 23

<sup>41</sup> Twelfth Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2002-2003, *Functioning of Family Courts*, Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Justice), p. 16

by building up their confidence and enabling them to take firm decisions about their lives. By educating women we can reduce poverty, improve productivity, ease population pressure and offer the children a better future.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, the Report says that 'gearing up of economic policies to improve employment of women and their earning capabilities so that they can *relieve the girls for educational activities*' (my emphasis).<sup>43</sup> In justifying education for women, the Report ends up linking education for women with goals of increased productivity and family planning. Further, improvement in women's employment and its logical connection with improving chances of girl's education is an absurd argument because it puts the blame of low percentage of girls in schools singularly on women.

The Report critiques the Indian State for keeping the current allocation of funds for education at only 3.8 per cent of the GDP against the suggested 6 per cent. Education in India has suffered to a great extent because of this factor. Overall, the Report on Education Programmes for Women does not seriously delve into the impediments in the way of women's education and what can be done to rectify the situation.

The Ninth Report of the Committee, interestingly, deals with Violence Against Women During Riots. This particular Report comes in the wake of violence

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<sup>42</sup> Sixth Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2001-2002, *Education Programmes For Women*, Ministry HRD (Department of Elementary Education and Literacy) and (Department of Secondary Education and Higher Education), p. 28

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29

unleashed on members of the Muslim community by Hindu fundamentalists following the Godhra incident in 2002. Outlining a background to the violence, the Report does not tell us which communities fought amongst themselves, and safely mentions the word 'disturbances' to play down the violence. The Report only talks in the language of 'majority' and 'minority' community. The Report blames the Gujarat state machinery for not taking pre-emptive steps to prevent the spread of violence. The Report actually ends up playing down the dynamic of the violence in Gujarat. Any number of researchers on Gujarat has shown that the violence in Gujarat amounted to state-sponsored pogrom in which Muslims were attacked in a systematic manner. To then expect that such a state machinery would have worked to prevent the spread of violence, really just shows diplomacy on the part of the Committee.

The Report speaks of the rehabilitation of women affected by violence and creating employment opportunities for them.<sup>44</sup> The Report also underscores the fact that recommendation like establishment of courts and an impartial enquiry by an agency from outside the State, to investigate the acts of violence during the 'riots', especially against women have not been implemented. It ends on a hope that the state machinery would work towards restoring peace and tranquility to all its citizens. To that extent, this Report does not really critique the Government machinery in Gujarat for actually inciting violence, a fact that has become pretty evident in the post-Godhra times.

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<sup>44</sup> Ninth Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2002-2003, *Violence Against Women During Riots*, Ministry of HRD (Department of WCD) and Ministry of Home Affairs, p. 16



The Fourth and the Thirteenth Reports of the Committee deal with Health and Family Welfare Programmes for Women. The emphasis in the Report is on an approach that takes care of women's health and care needs in holistic terms. The Report critiques the Reproductive and Child Health Scheme (RCH) for focussing only on the reproductive age group and ignoring the health needs of adolescent girls, and peri and post menopausal women. In its recommendations, it asked the Government to revise schemes/programmes for health care for women to adequately focus on promoting not only the reproductive health of women, but also of their general health from birth through old age with particular emphasis on some common health problems faced by women such as malnutrition, anemia, urinary tract infection, depression', etc.<sup>45</sup>

The Report also emphasized that massive health investment was required for creating awareness and sensitising people to various health programmes as well as the importance of the preventive aspect of health care. The Committee Report critiqued the Department of Health for calling all diseases gender neutral. The Report recognised that the impact of all communicable and non-communicable diseases is not gender neutral.<sup>46</sup> It is important that gender specific strategies in combating health problems be designed. The Report suggests that a 'separate allocation for women in the annual plan is necessary...for making interventions

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<sup>45</sup> Thirteenth Report, Committee on Empowerment of Women, 2002-03, *Health and Family Welfare Programmes for Women*, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Department of Health, Department of Family Welfare and Department of Indian Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy), p. 5

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10

specially required for women'.<sup>47</sup> The Report appreciated the initiative on promotion of male participation under 'Men in Planned Parenthood' launched by the Department in the Tenth Five Year Plan.<sup>48</sup> The goal of this new initiative is to promote gender equity and equality and *enable* men to take responsibility for their sexual reproductive behaviour and their social and family roles.<sup>49</sup>

In the area of Health for Women, one appreciates the level of awareness displayed by the Committee. It is commendable, the Committee noted, that for a holistic approach towards women's health, there is a need to devise specific health needs of women. It is appreciated that the Report suggests that the onus of family planning should not be squarely on women and that men ought to be equal participants in the planning of families.

## **PART THREE**

### ***Conclusion***

Summing up, the period since the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 was released; there have been these Committee Reports that have analysed various issues affecting women. The importance of these reports lies in the fact that they bring out the gap between the proclaimed policy statements and their working on the ground. In the event that the government releasing a National Policy for women for the first time, these reports give a very

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

good insight into the policies already in operation for women. They also take the Indian State to task of lacking in strategy in many places, for not ensuring mechanisms for proper implementation of policies, of increasing bureaucratization in the implementation process and sometimes really not giving a thought while outlining policies. The classic example would be a plethora of parallel Central and State policies running in rural areas for development of women. The Reports highlight that the State efforts fail sometimes because of the underutilisation of funds and for lack of infrastructural facilities. The policies of training programmes for women, developmental and income generation programmes for women have suffered on this count. Further, the Reports underscore State hypocrisy and double standards when it highlights that integrity of the National Commission for Women has suffered not only because of problems relating to funding and lack of infrastructural facilities, but also because its recommendations have consistently been ignored by the Government. The Reports have suggested that empowerment of women would really just remain a distant goal if the inadequacies and gaps pointed out above are not filled.

## CONCLUSION

In the analysis of government documents, in the preceding chapters, I have basically tried to look at the issues around which the Indian State located women and the way in which the subject of 'Woman' was dealt with. State's response to women's issues has been mixed and ambivalent, it has simultaneously been both progressive and retrogressive. For a good two decades after independence women were a category of citizens who required welfare measures to enable them to become good mothers and housewives. The State documents and the Education Policy in particular reflected this amply when it used categories of 'dutiful wife', 'carer', 'nurturer', etc. for women. The State's approach reflected a lot of biological determinism and an essentialist understanding of the subject of 'Woman'. During this period there was really no recognition of the fact that gender discrimination exists in society that needs to be rectified.

Since the 1970's women's issues have gained visibility. The recognition that women remained outside the mainstream development process came with the publication of the CWSI report and changes in the international context. Both national and international policy documents acknowledged that gender discrimination is one of the most pervading forms of institutionalised deprivation and that there is a need to rectify this situation. The 70's also brought the recognition and acceptance of the various ways in which women contribute to society and economy. Earlier cultural stereotypes were scrutinized, statistics were increasingly collected on sex- segregated basis, anti- discriminatory laws

were passed and a number of new plans, projects and programmes, and some form of national machinery for the advancement of women were created. Through the 80's and 90's the State asserted that its policies and programmes aimed to integrate women and make them economically independent and self-reliant. The key route to this integration was seen as more opportunities for employment through education training and access to credit. These programmes, however, have remained outside mainstream development process. This focus on equality, which required a redistribution of resources throughout the development process, remained only at a rhetorical level. This was due to the fact that the new focus on women was accommodated within the official agencies of development by linking it to poverty alleviation and basic needs programmes. The vocabulary of these programmes cast women in the role of managers of poor households and providers of basic needs of the family. The concern for women's productive roles was also incorporated as part of WID approach by recognizing that these responsibilities has an economic component and therefore, required income-enhancing measures. In actual terms this reassured continuity with the responsibilities for the family and child welfare and hence, hardly carried no real prospects for changing women's position in society and economy. In other words, the approach had within itself the potential to negate its own objectives and was intended to continue with the *status quo*. This was because defining *needs* in terms of family's basic needs rather than in terms of women's unequal access to productive resources and changing the institutionalised discrimination against them, was obviously more acceptable to

male-dominated implementing agencies as well as to entrenched patriarchal interests.

Thus the measures were designed in a way that would invoke least amount of resistance and with least amount of a possibility of change. The integration in development was not accompanied by corresponding efforts in redistribution of development resources like livestock, capital, credit, or in greater information or in increased sharing of power in decision-making bodies. At the formal legal level too, no initiatives were taken to guarantee equal sharing in parental and matrimonial property.

The change in the State's articulation on issues concerning women and the focus on empowerment of women reveals that these programmes though were radical in some ways, were actually grounded in faulty assumptions over the nature of State and State apparatus. While the programmes emphasized on changing the self- image and societal image of women, they provided no answers to problems that emerge when in the process of bringing this social change women have to confront their families, vested patriarchal interests and gender- biased State administration and police machinery. The classic case of the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi, a Sathin, who was part of the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan, by upper caste men, and their consequent acquittal by the courts is testimony to the fact that these programmes fell short of the intended goal of the State, i.e, Empowerment of Women. The State machinery backed out in the case

of Bhanwari Devi and it was the State machinery that upheld patriarchal interests, much to the detriment of the entire goal of women's empowerment.

The programmes launched as part of the participation and empowerment approach addressed the issue of women's lack of empowerment only from the point of view of biases prevailing at the level of society and the lack of confidence in women themselves. It overlooked the role played by the State structures, discriminatory laws, and market forces and the interplay of these with gender biases prevailing at the level of society.

Such an approach towards empowerment of women is radically different from earlier approaches but is not without problems. This approach assumes that the State is an impartial arbiter helping to enable women as deprived sections of society organize for exerting collective pressure, and effectively participating in the decision-making process with the ultimate objective of building foundations of individual and collective reliance. It also assumes that that same is possible without removing structural constraints on their capacities. These constraints have historically operated at different levels including socio-economic structures, ideology and political process. The concept of empowerment does not capture this as it fails to see that the State is also a power structure and therefore, has inherent limitations in supporting 'empowerment' of the poor and deprived.

Since the last decade the State has also ushered in the process of structural adjustment and economic reforms. There is a lot of literature on the adverse

effect of these policies on the already marginalized sections of society. Cheap and unorganized labour is the main attraction of multinational corporations and export-oriented industries in the third world. Women constitute bulk of the labour in the unorganized sector and they are the ones who suffer the most in the times of economic liberalization. Another effect of liberalization is related to the changes that privatization of common property resources and over exploitation of natural resources have brought about in the access of women, especially rural women, to basic necessities, thereby affecting their rights as workers and producers. Since the emphasis of these economic reforms is on economic growth and not on distributive justice, the resultant wage depression and price rise force women to enter labour market for sheer economic survival even when the State does not provide any alternatives or services for child-care and household work. Economic development of the last five decades has neither created sufficient employment nor eradicated poverty and the crises has been sharpened by the debt crisis and the consequent policies aimed at managing it which effectively means that for many years to come, the focus of the State would remain on huge debt repayment. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women does not, for instance, speak for increased funding of programmes for women at all.

Thus we see that from welfare to development, participation, empowerment to efficiency solutions have shifted but these changing perceptions have not been in tune with the mainstream development thinking and not against it. The emphasis



has mainly been to improve the material conditions and much less to change gender relations in their social context and ideological dimensions. I think that there is a need to go deeper into analyzing the State policies and actions with a view to uncover the nature and approach of the State towards women's issues, by laying bare the inconsistencies, contradictions and premises of the State's policies. The State has played and still plays an important role regulating all dimensions of women's lives. It has the authority to enact laws and formulate policies and to regulate and reallocate economic resources by which it can really better the lives of its citizens.

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