



# LAW MANTRA THINK BEYOND OTHERS

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## PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND CHILDEN RIGHTS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES\*

### Introduction of domestic violence: -

“Domestic violence is a burden on numerous sectors of the social system and quietly yet dramatically affects the development of a nation. Batterers cost nations fortunes in terms of law enforcement, health care, lost labor, and general progress and development these costs donor only affect the present generation; what begins as an assault by one person on another, reverberates through the family and the community into the future”

### Introduction and history: -

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, intimate partner violence, is defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, or cohabitation. Domestic violence so defined, has including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering, intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse (e.g.; neglect); and economic deprivation. Alcohol consumption and mental illness can be co-morbid with abuse and present additional challenges in eliminating domestic violence. Awareness, perception, definition of domestic violence differs widely from country to country, and have evolved from era to era. Domestic violence can also mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment, and stalking.

### Types of domestic abuse: -

All forms of domestic abuse have one purpose: To gain and maintain control over the victim. Abusers use many tactics to exert power over their spouse or partner as dominance, humiliation, isolation, threats, intimidation, denial and blame.

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### ***1-Physical abuse: -***

Physical abuse is abuse involving contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical suffering or bodily harm. It includes hitting ,slapping ,punching, choking, pushing, burning and other types of contact that result in physical injury to the victim Physical abuse can also include behaviors such as denying the victim of medical care when needed, depriving the victim of sleep or other functions necessary to live, or forcing the victim to engage in drug/alcohol use against his/her will. If a person is suffering from any physical harm then they are experiencing physical abuse. This pain can be experienced on any level. It can also include inflicting physical injury into other targets, such as children or pets, in order to cause psychological harm to the victim

### ***2. Sexual abuse and Marital Rape:***

Sexual abuse is any situation in which force or threat is used to obtain participation in unwanted sexual activity. Coercing a person to engage in sexual activity against their will, even if that person is a spouse or intimate partner with whom consensual sex has occurred, is an act of aggression and violence.

### ***3. Emotional Abuse:***

Emotional abuse(also called psychological abuse or mental abuse)can include humiliating the victim can and cannot do, withholding information from the victim, deliberately doing something to make the victim feel diminished or embarrassed, isolating the victim from friends and family, implicitly blackmailing the victim by harming others when the victim expresses independence or happiness, or denying victim access to money or other basic resources and necessities. Degradation in any form can be considered psychological abuse. Emotional abuse includes conflicting actions or statements which are designed to confuse and create insecurity in the victim. Emotional abuse can include verbal abuse is defined as any behavior that threatens , intimidates, undermines the victim's self-worth or self-esteem ,or controls victim's freedom. Verbal abuse is form of emotionally abusive behavior involving the use of language.

### ***4. Economic abuse: -***

It may involve preventing a spouse from recourse acquisition limiting the amount of resources to use acquisition, limiting the amount of resources to use by the victim, or by exploiting economic resources of the victim. The motive behind preventing a spouse from acquiring resources is to diminish victim's capacity to support him/himself, thus forcing him/her to depend on the perpetrator financially, which includes preventing the victim from obtaining education, finding employment education ,finding employment ,maintain or advancing their carriers, and acquiring assets.

### **Effects-**

### **1. Physical:**

Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations, and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization. Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, pelvic pain, ulcers, and migraines.

### **2. Psychological:**

among victims who are still living with perpetrators high amounts of stress, fear, and anxiety are commonly reported. Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for 'provoking' the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship, and have a greatly increased risk of suicidal tendencies.

In addition to depression either during or after termination of the relationship, and have a greatly increased risk of suicidal tendencies. In addition to depression, victims of domestic violence also commonly experience long-term anxiety and panic, and are likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic disorders. These symptoms are generally experienced for a long span of time after the victim has left in a dangerous situation.

### **3. Financial:**

once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy. Due to economic abuse and isolation, the victim usually has very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and the strongest factor that can discourage them from leaving their Perpetual.

### **Causes:**

There are many different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrator, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure, stress, social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

While there are many theories regarding what causes one individual to act violently towards an intimate partner or family member, there is also growing concern around apparent intergenerational cycles of domestic violence.

### **1. Psychological;**

This theory focusses on personality, traits and mental characteristics of the offender. Personality traits include sudden burst of anger, poor impulse control, and poor self-esteem. Various theories

suggest that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse experienced as a child leads some people to be more violent as adults. correlation has been found between juvenile delinquency and domestic violence and adulthood. Studies have found high incidence of psychopathy among abusers. Some research suggests that about 80% of men in these domestic violence studies exhibited diagnosable psychopathology and typical personality disorders.

## **2. Behavioral;**

This theory draws on the work of behavior analysts. Applied behavioral analysis uses the basic principles of learning theory to change behavior, this program leads to behavior therapy. Often by identifying the antecedents and consequences of violent action, the abusers can be taught self-control.

## **3. Social Stress:**

stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation with increased pressure. Social stress, inadequate finances or other such problems in a family may further increase tension. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress. Families and couple in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects.

## **4. Mental Illness:**

Many psychiatric disorders are risk factors for domestic violence, including several personality disorders paranoid passive aggressive bipolar disorder drug abuse alcoholism and poor impulse control are also risk factors. It is estimated that at least one third of all abusers have some type of mental illness.

Domestic violence affects 30% of women worldwide and more than 50% of women living in conflict or post conflict communities. The prevention of domestic violence is important, not only because it is violation of women's right and freedoms, but also because dv negatively affects economic growth and perpetuates structural poverty. An important mechanism driving this effect is the interaction between dv and low cooperation between spouses resulting in less than optimal health, education and economic outcomes. This dynamic is exacerbated in conflict-affected zones, where household cooperation is essential for post conflict recovery. The scope and breath of recent studies ; collectively the studies provide information on the dv experienced by young and middle aged women in traditional heterosexual marriages for both urban and rural environments , joint and nuclear families across Indian states among the studies specifying age limits ,the vast majority (88% or 92/104) evaluated dv experienced by women age of 15 to 50 , with only 11% (11/104) of studies surveying dv suffered by women above age of 50 and 1% (1/104) evaluating dv experience by young adolescence (wed before age 15) only one studies assessed dv experienced by women in HIV discordants. DV experienced by women in joint versus nuclear families. 37% (51/137)

evaluated domestic abuse suffered by women living in urban cities, 18% (24/1370 in rural, and the remainder 44% or 60/137 in both rural and urban environments. Only one examined DV experienced by women residing in tribes. Southern Indian states whereby far the most surveyed in the literature and northern Indian state which leads studies. Collectively, the reviewed studies demonstrate that DV occurs among Indian women with high frequencies but there is substantial variation in the reported prevalence estimates all form of DV.

### **Law enforcement:**

In 1983, Domestic Violence was recognized as a specific criminal offence by the introduction of section 498-A into the Indian Penal Code. This section deals with cruelty by a husband or his family towards married women.

Four types of cruelty are dealt with by this law:

- Conduct that is likely to drive a woman to suicide,
- Conduct which is likely to cause grave injury to the life, limb or health of the woman,
- Harassment with the purpose of forcing the woman or her relatives to give some property,
- Harassment because the woman or her relatives is unable to yield to demands for more money or does not give some property.

The punishment is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. The complaint against cruelty need not be lodged by the person herself. Any relative may also make the complaint on her behalf. The above section relates to the criminal provisions of a more stringent offence. The civil law does not however address this phenomenon in its entirety. There was a need of provision in law with more pliable remedies to offer within the broader framework of civil and criminal laws. A law was enacted keeping in view the rights guaranteed under the article 14, 15 & 21 of the constitution to provide for a remedy under civil law which is intended to protect the woman from being victims of domestic violence and to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence in the society.

### **Scope of the Act**

The scope of this piece of legislation has been expounded in plethora of judgement by the High Courts and the Supreme Court in India. For instance, in a recent judgment the High Court of Gujarat in the case of *Bhartiben Bipinbhai Tamboli v. State of Gujarat and ors.* while extensively discussing the provisions under the Domestic Violence Act remarked that: The domestic violence in this Country is rampant and several women encounter violence in some form or the other or almost every day. However, it is the least reported form of cruel behavior. This non- retaliation by women coupled with the absence of laws addressing women's issues, ignorance of the existing laws enacted for women and societal attitude makes the women vulnerable. The reason why most cases of domestic violence are never reported is due to the social stigma of the society and the attitude of the women



themselves, where women are expected to be subservient, not just to their male counterparts but also to the male relatives.

Till the year 2005, the remedies available to a victim of domestic violence were limited. The women either had to go to the civil court for a decree of divorce or initiate prosecution in the criminal court for the offence punishable under Section 498A of IPC. In both the proceedings, no emergency relief is available to the victim. Also, the relationships outside the marriage were not recognized.

### **Introduction of women empowerment: -**

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare-oriented approach to equity approach. It has been understood as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. Empowerment particularly includes control over resources and ideology. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) it leads to a growing intrinsic capability- greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasizes on two important aspects. Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals but not a power over others. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless- whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Though concept of empowerment is not specific to women, yet it is unique in that and it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households

Women empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and also at the level of material security) and internal qualities [Human Development in South Asia (2000) as quoted by Mathew(2003)].UNDP (1990) for the first time introduced the concept of Human Development Index (HDI) that evolved initially as a broader measure of socio-economic progress of a nation but it became popular as a measure of average achievements in human development for both the sexes. Contrary to the general belief that development is gender neutral, statistics show that women lag behind men all over the world including India in almost all aspects of life. It is for this reason that the focus on human development has been to highlight the gender dimension and continuing inequalities confronting women since 1995 (UNDP 1995). The Report noted that without empowering women overall development of human beings is not possible. It further stressed that if development is not engendered, is endangered. To bring out the facts and figures relating to deprivation of women two indices, namely, Gender related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were introduced. While GDI measures the achievements in the same dimensions and variables as the HDI, it also takes into account inequality in achievement between women and men (Anand and Sen, 1995). A number of studies have been undertaken on women empowerment at the global level and in India. Some studies dealt on methodological issues, some on empirical analysis and some others on the measures and tools of empowerment. We have presented in this section first some of the important studies which were undertaken at the international level followed by other studies conducted in India. Moser (1993) focused on the interrelationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and the implementation of gender planning and practices. The work

of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. The work of Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) is an important contribution on women empowerment in the context of India. The authors used a policy of political reservation for women in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decision. They found that women were more likely to participate in policy making process if the leader of the village community was happened to be women. Mahanta (2002) sought to explain the question of women's access to or deprivation of basic human rights as the right to health, education and work, legal rights, rights of workingwomen's, besides issues like domestic violence, all the while keeping the peculiars-cultural situation of the North East in mind. A workshop organized in 2003 by the Institute of Social Sciences and South Asia Partnership, Canada addressed the issues like "Proxy Women" who after being elected to Panchayat bodies were merely puppets in the hands of their husbands, relatives and other male Panchayat members; and emphasized on training programme for their capacity building. Assam Human Development Report (Govt. of Assam, 2003) threw some light on inequality in the achievement between men and women of Assam in different spheres of life. There port viewed that poverty, violence and lack of political participation were the main issues concern for South Asian Women, and Assam was no exception. The study of Kishor and Gupta (2004) revealed that average women in India were disempowered relative to men, and there had been little change in her empowerment over time. Blumberg (2005) viewed that economic empowerment of women was the key to gender equality and wellbeing of a nation. This would not only enhance women's capacity of decision making but also lead to reduction in corruption, armed conflict and violence against females in the long run. Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on the factor like women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence and opined that if development means expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress .Desai Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment. Figueres (2008) in her work studied the effect of female political representation in State legislature on public goods, policy and expenditure in the context of India and opined that politician's gender and social position matters for policy.

Shariff (2009) suggested a specific measure for gender empowerment for India keeping in view culture specific conditions prevalent in the country. The dimensions and factors used in his paper are very different from those identified. He identified six dimensions for which dependable data are available from sample surveys and government records. The dimensions are literacy, work participation rate, decision making power, ownership of resources, reproduction and care and political participation. Using these dimensions he constructed GEI for major Indian states and found overall GEI to be 0.424 at the all India level and varying from the lowest value of 0.238 in Uttar Pradesh to the highest value of 0.646 in Kerala. Mishra and Nayak (2010) in their work emphasized how education plays a central role in human development; as a matter of fact the other two components—health and income - are dependent on educational development. Education permits a person to inherit the wealth of knowledge amassed over generations. Education increases the chances of fitness and employ ability. Additionally, education leads to fulfillment. Skill formation, which has quite limited scope to inculcate among the illiterate, is a necessary condition to foster growth. Therefore, literacy and some extent of educational proficiency are of fundamental

importance for skill formation. In particular, literacy among the females is of great importance, not only for participation in productive and civic activities, but also for rearing children for a better future.

Thus, from the above review of literature it is evident that quite a number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related issues. The present study in this respect analyzes the status of women empowerment in India by taking into consideration various dimensions.

### **The Case of India**

As far as India is concerned, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and finds a place in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the States to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Historically the status of Indian women has been influenced by their past. There is evidence to show that women in the Vedic age got most honored positions in the society. They had the right to education and were free to remain unmarried and devote their whole life to the pursuit of knowledge and self realization. They were highly respected within and out side home. Gradually due to several socio-political changes, especially during the middle age, the glorious status of women declined. The urge for equality on the part of Indian women started getting momentum during the colonial times. Noted social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, Sorojini Naidu and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar made selfless efforts to create awareness among women about their status and were quite successful in removing various social evils such as sati pratha, child marriage, and polygamy. They also encouraged widow remarriage and women education. The reformers were successful in creating a base for development of women and their strive for equality. In course of time Indian society got transformed from traditional to a modern one. Consequently, women became more liberal and aware of various ways of life. Since they are quite capable of breaking the traditional barriers imposed by the society are now challenging the patriarchal system though in a limited scale. Since independence, the Government of India has been making various efforts to empower women. In various plan periods, the issues regarding women empowerment has been given priority. From fifth five-year plan onwards there has been a remarkable shift from welfare-oriented approach of women empowerment to Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India provided opportunity to women to take part in active politics. The year 2001 was declared as the year of women's empowerment for enhancing their status. To achieve the goal, the government introduced different programmes, identified strategies, established different institutions and made various legal provisions. In spite of all these efforts and actions, women in India still lag behind the men. According to 2001 Census, female literacy rate in the country was 54.2 per cent as against 75.9 per cent in case of males. Although literacy rates for both the sexes were witnessing increasing trend over the years from



1951 to 2001 the gap between them were also simultaneously increasing till 1981 and since then it has started declining but the progress has not been as much as was expected. The situation has been much worse in the rural and remote areas of the country. In spite of women going for higher education they are facing exclusion from their male counterparts and are alienated in various positions in governance. The incidence like early marriage, female feticides and infanticide, dowry, bride burning, rape, molestation, kidnapping etc. are very frequent. The record of crime against women indicates an increasing trend (Sharma and Gupta, 2004: 122). The position of women in the country in the social, economic and political fields is by no means equal to that of their male counterparts. Besides low female literacy, there are many other factors that have contributed to gender biasness. Girl child is still given less priority in certain parts of India. Past studies indicate that it is the people's perception in general that the birth of a girl child is less desirable and evokes less happiness than that of a boy child (Seth, 2001). It is ingrained in the Indian psyche, cutting across religion, caste and region. Since her birth she is victimized in all spheres including education, employment, nutrition and social status. The World Economic Forum (2005), in its first gender gap study placed India at 53rd position among 58 nations, which shows a significant gap in male and female achievements. UNDP/UNFPA in its various Human Development Reports since 1990 have placed India at a very low level of development regarding the position of women in terms of various indicators such as adult literacy, gross enrolment, share of seats in parliament and the professional and technical positions held by them. The rank of India has also gone down from 99 in 1995 to 113 in 2007-08 and has been fluctuating from year to year. The National Commission for women was set up by an Act of National Human Development Report (G.O.I, 2002) brought out information on indices on GDI and GEM. GDI showed marginal improvement during the eighties. GEI increased from 62 per cent in the early eighties to 67.6 per cent in the early nineties. This implies that on an average the attainments of women on human development indicators were only two-thirds of those of men. At the State level, gender equality was the highest for Kerala followed by Manipur, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland in the eighties. Goa and the Union Territories, States that did well in improving their female literacy levels are also the ones that substantially improved their gender equality. On the whole, gender disparities across the States declined over the period.

### **Decision Making Power**

Decision making power of women in households is one of the important indicators of women empowerment. It is found that only 37 per cent of currently married women participate in making decisions either alone or jointly with their husband on their health care, large household purchases, purchases for daily household needs and on visiting their family members and relatives (Table 1). Forty three percent participate in some but not all decisions and 21 per cent do not participate in any of the decision. As high as in 32.4 per cent cases the decision regarding the purchase of daily household needs is taken mainly by the respondents whereas the decisions like visit to her relatives are in most cases taken alone by husbands or jointly. Decision like major household purchases is

taken jointly in most of the cases. A very smaller number of women alone take this type of decision. About 27 per cent of total respondents take their own health care decision alone.

### **Freedom of Movement**

Free mobility of women is another indicator of women empowerment. The data reveals that about half of women are allowed to go to the market or to the health facility alone. Only 38 per cent are allowed to travel alone to places outside the village or community. While not all women are allowed to go to these places alone, only a minority are not allowed to go at all. Compared to urban women, rural women have less mobility.

### **Access to Education**

Women's access to education which is one of the important sources of empowerment can be measured by gender gap in literacy rates and enrolment indifferent stages of school education. The literacy gap between men and women was as high as 21.7 per cent in 2001. Though the gap was fluctuating from 18.3 percent in 1951 to 23.9 per cent in 1971, it has been showing a marginal declining trend since 1981. Enrolment by stages from 1951 to 2001-02. It is clear that participation of girls at all stages of education has been steadily increasing over time. However, the overall performance of participation has not been satisfactory as it had been below 50 per cent at all stages of education.

### **Access to Employment:**

The employment and cash earnings of currently married men and women. National Family Health Survey data published by Govt. of India reveal that only 43 per cent of married women in the age group of 15-49 years are employed as against 99 per cent of married men in the same age group. It also reveals that gender inequality exist in the arena of employment. As compared to 51 per cent married women employed for cash only, the corresponding figure for that of the males is as high as 72.5 per cent. 24% women are not paid at all for their work whereas this proportion is as low as 5% for men. For women earning cash is not likely to be a sufficient condition for financial empowerment. Employment and cash earnings are more likely to empower women if women make decisions about their own earnings alone or jointly with their husband rather than their husband alone and if these earnings are perceived by both wives and husbands.

In this connection shows the extent of women's control over earnings on the basis of background characteristics like age, education, place of residence, household structure, etc. It is seen that women's control over cash earnings increases with age. In the age group 15 -19 years only 17.7 per cent women alone take decision about the use of their cash earnings as compared to 28.3 per cent in the age group 40-49 years. Place of residence also affects women's control over their cash earnings.

Generally, women in urban areas have more control over their earnings than that in rural areas. About thirty-three per cent take decision alone about the use of their own earnings in urban areas as compared to 21 per cent in rural areas.

### **Domestic Violence conclusion**

Percentage of women who have experienced different forms and combinations of physical and sexual violence according to selected background characteristics. It is observed that extent of violence is not lessened by age. In the age group of 15-19 years, 22.5 per cent women experienced physical or sexual violence in India as compared to 39 per cent in the age group 40-49 years. Both types of violence are higher for ever married women than for never married women. Almost 40 % ever married women experienced physical or sexual violence as against 16.9 % never married women. Extent of domestic violence is higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. About thirty-eight per cent women in rural area faced either physical or sexual violence as compared to about 29 percent women in urban areas.

### **Constraints to Women Empowerment:**

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structures in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of such norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child, which is present in almost all societies and communities. The hold of this preference has strengthened rather than weakened and its most glaring evidence is in the falling sex ratio (Seth, 2001). The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception in Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural, thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India. It is another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. In a poor family, girls are the main victims; they are malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education and other facilities. But if they are financially independent or they have greater control over the resources then they exhibit greater autonomy both in the household and in public sphere and are no longer victims of poverty. Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women are not aware of their legal rights. Even women who are aware lack the courage to take the legal step. The legislation which affects women most is their situation in marriage and inheritance. As far as the rights of inheritance are concerned, women generally do not try to inherit land left by their parents if brothers are alive (Seth, 2001). The traditional belief that land should not go outside the patriarchal family operates. The provision of Act like (1) Child Marriage Resistance Act, 1930, (2) The Suppression of Immoral Trafficking of Women Act, 1987 and (3) The Indecent Exposure of Women Act, have not led to the suppression of practice indicated in them. Of these three, the first one is by and large successful in restraining child marriage. The legislation almost failed in case of immoral trafficking and indecent exposure

to women. There are numerous incidences of indecent exposure of women in all forms of media with hardly any prosecution. Although the legal rights are in place to create an enabling atmosphere these have not been very successful in realizing women's empowerment.

### **Summary and Findings**

Various indicators of women empowerment are analyzed using the data from various sources while discussing women's present status in India. The main emphasis is given to the indicators like women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, women's acceptance of unequal gender roles, exposure to media, access to education, women's experience of domestic violence etc. Women's political participation is also analyzed by using indicators like percentage of women voters and women MPs. After analyzing the data, it is found that household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with age, education and employment. Freedom of movement of widow or divorcee is more than ever married or never married women. Similarly, it is found that in the society the acceptance of unequal gender norms by women themselves are still prevailing. More than half of the women believe that wife beating is justified for any of the specific reasons like not cooking properly, not taking proper care of household and children, refuse to have sex with husband, showing disrespect to in-laws etc. However, this attitude is not varying much with age or household structure but decline sharply with education and places of residence. While studying women's access to education and employment it is found that gender gap exists in both the situations. A large gender gap in literacy exists and participation of girls at all stages of education is below 50%. Similarly, less than 50% of women are employed and a significant portion of them are not paid for their work. However, having access to employment does not mean that women have full control over their earnings. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age and with place of residence in urban areas and education, but not vary significantly with household structure. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Women's experience of domestic violence shows that violence is not lessened by age. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than urban women. Regarding women's political participation it is found that large gender gap exists in voting and less than ten percent of total member in Lok Sabha are Women. This is because most of the women lack desired level of financial autonomy, literacy, strong personality, own decision-making capacity, family support etc. Thus, we see that these mutually interdependent factors reinforce each other and put women in a disadvantageous position relative to men. Various constraints in achieving the desired level of empowerment are also identified. Important among them are poverty, social norms and family structure, lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provision etc. Generally speaking, the women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men. In spite of so many efforts undertaken by government and NGOs the picture at present is not satisfactory. Mere access to education and employment can only help in the process of empowerment. These are the tools or the enabling factors through which the process gets speeded up. However, achievement towards this goal depends more on attitude. Unless the attitude towards the acceptance of unequal gender

role by the society and even the women themselves changed women cannot grab the opportunity provided to them through constitutional provision, law etc. Till then we cannot say that women are empowered in India in its real sense.



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