

Editorial

History is witness that women in developing countries have been double victims of subordination and inequality in society. The mindset of patriarchy divides male and female into the category of dominant and subordinate. As a result, the burden of hardship falls disproportionately on women, especially in developing countries like India.

In India access to the public sphere mainly remained the prerogative of men for a long time thereby limiting the emergence of women. In other words they were confined to one dimensional roles often associated with sexuality. However, after a long struggle in the existing traditional society through the constant mutating processes of identity construction, women in contemporary India have scaled significant heights in various sectors. Today, Indian women can be seen contributing significantly to every sphere of the country's social, political and economic streams and are now active in almost all domains – be it defence, police, politics, academics, administration, corporate, sport, science, entertainment and the rest. In fact they should be entitled to receive double credit because most of them are doing all this alongside their home responsibilities, which in itself is a full time job.

However, despite the appreciable strides, a significant percentage of the women population in India still struggle with various issues related to social needs, financial and legal options, health and nutrition, etc. Available data indicate that this stratum of women in India often have to deal with issues such as violence, child marriages, trafficking, lack of education, gender bias, etc. Hence, it is being felt increasingly that women's subordination and exploitation is a result of their powerlessness in patriarchal society and hence there is a need of empowerment of this marginalized section of the society.

Empowerment of women has been the focus of the work of both the development practitioners as well as the researchers. Although the National Policy for Women, 2016 promises to take us towards a society in which women attain their full potential in all spheres of life and influence the process of social change, but looking at the present scenario it may be said that positive results as outcome are still awaited. There is no doubt that government and other agencies are doing their bit for women empowerment in India. But it would be difficult to achieve the goal unless each one of us contributes to the cause.

There is a need to combat the gender system not only through its instruments of which men and women are both a part, but also through various institutions (family, education, religion, and politics), norms, values and practices of the gender system which propagate elements such as child preference, male inheritance, masculinity in gender roles, dowry system, and the like. The nucleus for all these elements is home and therefore any change should begin there. The first step for empowering women starts when parents give equal opportunities to their sons and daughters to pursue education and the freedom to take decisions.

Besides, the health status of women also acts as an impediment in the process of development and empowerment of women. Family planning, basic health services, and education could empower them to join the organized labour force in large numbers, which could further empower them.

There is a need to formulate a comprehensive development policy dealing with the social, cultural and political practices at family and society level. However, the concern should be to find the right mix of strategies that would first, address women's need as women and the related marginalization; and second, make women as much part of the development process as men. For this, representation from government departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) needs to be taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of programmes; and evaluation of projects and schemes on gender equality and empowerment of women.

The women folk belong to our original social body and as such they need to be liberated through the process of strengthening their mentality and activity orientation. Thus, there is a need for transgression of social taboos for the emergence of a new role. Moreover, there is also a need of metamorphosis of gender roles. For this, co-operation from male counterparts of family and society is needed to bring about real empowerment of women that will change the lives of thousands who continue to live in subordination, poverty, deprivation of basic rights, inequality in job allotments, non-participation in decision making, domestic violence, so on and so forth.

Empowerment is a continuous process which should be generated from within the society, as sexual division of labour and other aspects of gender relations are shaped by the texture and structure of family and kinship in the society. However, care should be taken during the process of empowerment and women should not try to compete with

their counterparts in order to overtake them. As doing so would lead to the instability in the complementing gender roles ascribed to both of them by nature for the existence and continuity of the human kind. Underlining the significance of the subject this thematic issue presents six research articles and one book review. The summary of the featured articles are provided in the following paragraphs:

In the first article Pallavi Thacker and H.P. Mathur have attempted to find out the significance of symbolic action on social media in the context of women empowerment. Analyzing the qualitative data collected from 18 respondents by using two softwares – Navivo and R language, the authors have found that symbolic action on social media is good for creating awareness among masses. But such actions in no way ensure women empowerment. The authors believe that real women empowerment is when women are well informed and form an equal part of the society as men.

The second article is about empowerment of poor tribal women through micro-credit schemes where Priyanka Sahu and T.K. Venkatachalapathy have examined the role of SHG scheme in empowering rural poor women of Khunti district of Jharkhand state. Based on the primary survey conducted on a sample of 118 poor tribal women during June 2016 – August 2016, the authors have found that post SHGs have started saving and borrowing with banks rather than depending on their relatives and friends resulting in their financial inclusion. The authors conclude that the rural women's perceived benefits from the scheme of SHG programme have improved their major economic and political decision-making.

Meo Muslims are a unique community and need focus and discussion given their vulnerable position in social, cultural, economic and political contexts. In the third paper Bindiya Narang and Zubair Meenal have brought forth critical issues around reproductive health of women in a remote village in Haryana. Using a constructivist approach the authors have analysed the women's shared meanings and subjective view points on issues pertaining to puberty and menstruation, marriage and fertility, contraception and family planning, pregnancy and child birth, etc. The authors have found that in the traditional and patriarchal community of meo-muslims, most of the women were reticent and secretive about their reproductive health needs, which were stressed by a plethora of contextual marginalities as well as preconceived socio-cultural-religious norms and beliefs, all embedded in the web of gender specific vulnerabilities. The authors are of the opinion that there is a pressing need for community mobilization programmes and health education

interventions to purposely engage men and promote their involvement in facilitating women's reproductive healthcare seeking.

In the fourth article, by analyzing empirical data collected with the help of Time Use Survey, obtained from varied groups of female caregivers in the Lucknow province of Uttar Pradesh, Hema Prakash and Ankur Yadav have attempted to examine the concealed economic factors of unpaid care work and its consequences on women's lives (personal growth, mental and physical well-being, economic dependence). The authors have found that over representation of care work and women as care givers have led them to several vulnerabilities within socio-economic setup, depriving them from achieving equalities and well-being. The authors believe that the analysis of various socio-economic and cultural factors through gender statistics, gender responsive budget and qualification of unpaid time allocation with time use survey would be helpful to provide an improved and more generalized interpretations.

Self-Help Group (SHG) training programmes provide multi-dimensional awareness for the social development of the SHG members in rural areas. In the fifth article Ankur Yadav and Hema Prakash have examined the improvements on social challenges of the SHG women in Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh as a result of information based training programme and its impact on their social and domestic lives. The authors have found that the SHG members of Sultanpur district have achieved a variety of benefits through information generation and social awareness training programmes. The benefits achieved by the SHG members ranged from improvement of social status, self identity to decision making power in the matter of education, marriage, financial investment, purchase of family goods, health care, agriculture practices, and reduction in domestic violence. The authors believe that despite some challenges Raju Gandhi Mahila Vikas Pariyojna (RGMVP) has improved the lives of thousands of women and their families in the Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Trafficking of women is one of the most horrible forms of human rights violation and acts as a massive menace in the way of women empowerment. In the sixth paper titled "Trafficking: A Mockery to Women Empowerment", Afkar Ahmed by analyzing data collected through doctrinal research has made an attempt to explore the various dimensions of trafficking of women in India and suggested some measures to curb this widespread problem. The author concludes that the rescued women from the traffickers should be given skill development training for securing a better livelihood in the future.

Finally, Sudeep Kumar presents a review of the recently released book titled "Towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles: Some insights" edited by Suresh Misra and Sapna Chadah, published by Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi. The book primarily deals with various perspectives of sustainable consumption. It explains and highlights various issues underpinning sustainable consumption and provides solutions to at least some of the problems if not all. The reviewer believes that there is a scope to improve the content of the book by including some chapters on behavioural dimensions of sustainable consumption for environmental sustainability as consumption is related with human behaviour also. Nevertheless, the reviewer has the opinion that the edited volume is well organized and ignites our thought process on the topical issue under concern.

We hope that the articles in this thematic issue will be read by practitioners and decision-makers, and may contribute to the better formulation and management of the strategies related with the issues of women empowerment in future. We are thankful to the contributors who have generously submitted their revised papers within the stipulated time frame. Our sincere thanks go to the esteemed reviewers of the journal for their critical eyes, constructive comments, and rich advice that enhance the academic quality of this journal. We welcome articles on a host of development and management themes as well as reviews of books - preferably of reputable publishing houses.

June, 2018

Dr. Alexius Ekka, S.J.
Editor-in-Chief