

## Chapter – 2

### PRIORITY GENDER CONCERNS AND ISSUES

#### 2.1 Gender Equity

The principles of gender equity are enshrined in the Indian Constitution, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive principles, contained in Articles 14, 15, 16, 39, 42 and 51 etc. Drawing authority from the constitutional provisions, the Government has been continuously striving towards all round well being, development and empowerment of women. For furthering and protecting the interest of women, the Government has enacted a plethora of legislations like Dowry prohibition Act, 1961; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; PNDT (Pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic Act, 1994, 2003); Prohibition of child marriage Act, 2006; Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 etc. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, initiating the process of participation of women in decision making at the local levels. The laws, development policies, plans and programmes have all aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. These laws are constantly reviewed aiming at achieving social, economic and political empowerment of women.

However the actual scenario is in stark contrast to what was conceived by the makers of the Constitution. As succinctly brought out by Manjula Krishnan in Mehta and Krishnan, (2007), women generally are disadvantaged and marginalized members of society and face numerous challenges at every stage of their lives. The discrimination starts in the form of female foeticide or infanticide, even before a girl is born. If she is allowed to be borne, the life ahead is full of discrimination at different stages of life, in one or the other form. Discrimination during the initial stages of growth is in terms of breast feeding, non-immunization, neglect of health, nutrition and hygiene and the

girl child may become prone to ailments such as anaemia, iodine deficiency, vitamin 'A' deficiency, blindness and life-threatening diseases like polio, diarrhoea etc. When she grows older and reaches pre-adolescent and adolescent age, she faces additional discrimination in terms of access to education, sibling care, child marriage, early pregnancy, child labour, child abuse, violence and trafficking. She may also become a victim of HIV/AIDS. When she attains womanhood, along with the already existing problems, new ones are added - such as repeated child bearing, frequent and unhygienic abortions, child birth under unfavourable conditions, high maternal mortality rate (MMR), etc. The position on other fronts is also not much different. On the economic front also women face a number of disadvantages - such as lack of assets, access to finance and other income generating facilities, drudgery, unpaid and unrecognized work etc. In the old age, she faces different kind of problems such as insecurities related to health, finance and resources, destitution, marital status, emotional and psychological well-being. The problems afflicting women are, therefore, multi dimensional with cross cutting sectoral issues. These problems need the attention of both, the policy makers and the society.

IPC, (2008), draws attention on gender inequality issues stating that "gender inequality is not only costly to women, but it is also costly to children and men. It exacts costs in lower output, lower development of people's capacities, lower leisure and lower well-being." The publication has tried to link gender inequality and women's empowerment with some key factors like education, economic wellbeing and health. The World Bank reports state that increases in women's well-being yield productivity gains in the future. The report describes that the probability of children being enrolled in school increases with their mother's educational level and extra income going to mothers has more positive impact on household investment in nutrition, health and education of children than extra income going to fathers. This clearly brings out why gender inequality is to be addressed for the general good of the society. Gender equality is important for the reason that it has a bearing on family harmony and on wellbeing in many dimensions. This gender inequality, if not handled at the right time in an effective way, can become an efficiency

issue and restrict the further growth and development of the society and country. Reduction of gender inequality promises significant returns. Empowering women by improving their living conditions and enabling them to actively participate in the social and economic life of a Country may well be the key for long-term sustainable development.

## **2.2 Vision and concerns of the State**

It has been widely accepted that the goals of human development are closely intertwined with empowerment of women, which constitute about 496 million (2001 Census), representing 48.2% of the total population of India. The vision of the Government is to have empowered women living with dignity and contributing as equal partners towards the development of the country, in an environment free from violence and exploitation. The Government has also established 'National commission for women', a statutory body, to look into various issues to safeguard the interests of women. A 'National Policy for Empowerment of Women' has also been promulgated to strengthen the resolve of the Government for the cause of women. The Government has been working on various programmes / schemes in the areas such as health, education, employment, food security etc. to improve the condition of women in the country. Several agencies are involved in collection and compilation of information so as to facilitate policy formulation, review and implementation by the Government.

For a focused and comprehensive approach to development, the tool of five year plan was adopted by the Government. Certain specific targets were set for women in entire planned development process. The planning process has evolved over the years from purely 'welfare' oriented approach to the 'development' approach which has very recently become the 'empowerment' approach. All the five year plans have taken cognizance of the needs of women and set the targets accordingly. These targets exhibit the concerns of policy makers for needs of the women. Planning Commission, along with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, has been striving for

empowerment of women by taking several initiatives for bringing about gender equality, development and protection of women. Recognising the need of the time, different issues were given priority in the successive five year plans. Currently, the focus of the Government is on fulfilling the promises of Eleventh Plan.

The Union Government has adopted a five fold agenda in the Eleventh Plan for gender equity-

- Ensuring economic empowerment;
- Engineering social empowerment;
- Enabling political empowerment;
- Effective implementation of women related legislation;
- Creating Constitutional mechanism for gender mainstreaming and strengthening delivery mechanism.

Eleventh Plan Document list out the immediate concerns of the State as specific targets, to be achieved in a time bound manner. These actions are supposed to bring women empowerment by improving the condition of women in these sectors. The Government prepares its policies in accordance with these priorities outlined in various plans (currently Eleventh plan) for inclusive growth of women. It can be inferred that the areas which have drawn the attention of the Government as the immediate concerns of the Government presently are incorporated in the Eleventh Plan Document (2007-2012). These areas and the targets are listed here –

- To raise the Sex Ratio for age group 0-6 from 927 in 2001 to 935 by 2011-12 and to 950 by 2016-17.
- Reduce maternal mortality rate (MMR) from 3.01 to 1 percent per 1000 live births.
- Reduce anaemia among women and girls by 50% by the end of 2011-12.
- Reduce drop out rate for primary and secondary schooling by 10% for both girls and boys.

- Ensure that at least 33% of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of all Government schemes are women and girl children

From these well documented priorities of the Government, it is very clear that **correcting the skewed sex ratio and improving the indicators in health, education and employment sectors** are the immediate and primary areas of concern along with ensuring sharing of resources by the women and the girl children.

The Government has decided its priorities based on extensive ground work done by the executive through its field establishments, data analysis and information available in public domain as well as information provided by the working groups and Steering Committees setup for the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. The very same factors were also identified as the key areas determining women's empowerment by the '2005-06 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3)' reports in Kishor and Gupta, (2009). The survey was the third in the series, conducted under the stewardship of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India. The survey provides trend data on key indicators of family welfare, maternal and child health, nutrition and includes information on several topics such as use of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, HIV prevalence, attitudes toward family life, education for girls and boys, men's involvement in maternal care, high-risk sexual behaviour and health insurance coverage etc.

The other concerns that need attention are food security, women and law, technology for women, community health and hygiene, environment, trafficking of women etc.

### **2.2.1 Skewed sex ratio and Health**

In India, examples of health and population indicators that are governed by gender differences include sex ratios at birth, infant and child mortality by sex, low age at marriage for women etc. Gender discrimination is clearly revealed in statistics pertaining to the female - male ratio. The sex ratio for the 0-6 age

group declined steeply from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001(as per census 2001), implying that millions of girls went missing in just a decade. The NFHS – 3 studies find that it has further declined to 918 in 2005-06. A falling child sex ratio could be due to several factors - foeticide, neglect, infanticide and reflects reduced tolerance for girl children in the society. Ultrasound tests are being widely used for sex determination and consequent female foeticide. NFHS-3 survey confirms that preference for a son persists in the society very strongly and is the root cause for the declining sex ratio. Gender discrimination is equally visible in several other health indicators. A similar pattern in gender differentials was observed by the survey in the child mortality rate (the number of deaths to children age 1–4 years per 1,000 children reaching age 1 year). In India as a whole, the child mortality rate for girls, at 23 per 1,000, is 61% higher than for boys, at 14 per 1,000. Further, the proportion of male children who are fully immunized in NFHS-3 is 9% higher than the corresponding proportion of female children. Health of underage mothers is another area which needs attention. To a large extent the problem of high maternal mortality and maternal morbidity can be attributed to underage motherhood.

The effects of ill health, especially on women, have been analysed by Mehta, (2006). While poverty and ill health affect both men and women, the problems get compounded for women more, for many reasons. The women's lack of access and control over resources has been identified as the primary cause. The unpaid care work done by women when any member of the family falls ill puts women under too much of stress and burden, which leads to their higher levels of tiredness and morbidity. In addition, incidences of anemia due to lack of nutrition are found more in women. Since they are the last to eat in many homes, when there is no food left or not sufficient food is available, women face the brunt, (Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, 2004, as cited in Mehta, 2006).

NFHS – 3 indicates that among pregnant women, anaemia has increased from 50 % to 58 %. Its observations on reach of women to healthcare facilities show that women face a number of hurdles in accessing health care for themselves. The most common being the distance to a health facility.

Healthcare to aged women, to marginalized women, to HIV / AIDS afflicted women etc are numerous such areas that need attention of the policy makers. The Government is aware of all these health requirements and attention is being given to health sector through various policy interventions. Provision of health services for women is a major head in the budgetary expenditure done by the Government. Approximately 27 % of the Gender Budget share is used to address the health issues. Among the many heads under the health budget, maternal and child health as well as family planning have generally got the attention under Government Policies. However, gaps still persist in what is being done and what is required, both in terms of quantity and quality.

### **2.2.2 Education**

Education of women is an area which needs a lot of attention. It is the education which can make a remarkable effect on other factors of life as well. Through various studies education of women has been associated with lower infant mortality and better child health and nutrition. It is, therefore, necessary that gender differences in access to education and educational attainments are properly addressed.

The achievement of Universal Primary Education has been a primary concern of Indian planning since Independence. However, the targets for increasing access to primary schooling still leaves the policy makers unanswered. Questions of educational quality and school retention remain to be addressed. In this overall scenario, the position of girl child and woman is still worse. As per the findings of NFHS-3, only two-third of girls and three-fourth of boys in the age group 6-17 years are going to school. The Annual Report of the Department of School Education puts this figure as 4.28 % National Average in 2009. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1000 boys. In the latest estimates of the Department, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the classes 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> is 116 for boys and 113 for girls. This ratio starts tilting against girls as we move to higher classes. For classes 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, the ratio for girls drops down to 41 whereas for boys it is 49. In the area of attendance in school, there is gender equality in children's school attendance in urban areas

but in rural areas, the female disadvantage in education is marked and increases with age. School dropout beyond primary school is a major problem, more for girls. A consequence of high dropout beyond the primary school level is the low educational attainment of adults. Even among the population age 20-29 years, only 27% of women have 10 or more years of education.

As per census 2001, National Literacy Rate (for age 7+) was around 75.8% for males and merely 54.16 % for females. The NFHS findings reveal that it has improved for men to become 78 % in 2005-06, whereas for women estimates have reached only up to 55%. As regards position about school attendance rate, the problem is more in rural areas and not so much in urban areas. The net attendance rate for primary schooling is 69 % for girls and 73 % for boys, at the age group 6-17 years. However this figure drops to 40 % for girls and 55 % for boys in the secondary school level. The school drop out rate is quite high for girls, especially in the rural areas. For poorer households, children's time spent in school is time not spent in contributing to the economic activity of the household and hence the drop outs. As a girl child is often given the responsibility of looking after the younger siblings, the drop out rate is higher among girls than in boys. The studies done under NFHS -3 confirm large gender disparities in rural areas and a high dropout rate for girls at the secondary level also. It indicates that education of girls at elementary level in rural areas needs more attention. The situation is more alarming for girls belonging to SC and ST communities.

When it comes to higher education, the ground realities show a very dismal state of affairs. Access of women for higher education is too little. Economic development can not sustain with a population that has hardly completed primary education. For a higher growth rate, it needs a pool of highly educated and skilled human resources. To address this issue a high level of educational attainment of both women and men is necessary. Economists consider higher education of women as the key to demographic change, family welfare, better health and nutrition of women and their families. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge and ways of

understanding and getting better employment. Thus encouraging women for higher education and facilitating such an environment is a real concern.

### **2.2.3 Employment**

Employment for women is considered a major instrument of their wellbeing. It is only through employment that women can think of attaining economic empowerment. Relative lack of employment opportunities for women has probably been responsible for the prevalence of greater poverty among adult women. NFHS studies establish that women in the age group 15-49 are about half as likely to be employed as men in the same age group. The figure is 43 % for females as against 87 % for men. The studies also reveal that most employed women work in agriculture and only 7 % work in professional, technical or managerial occupations. This again puts forth another concern for the policy makers as well as for the society. Because of globalization, there is a need for reframing policies for employment and related areas. Benefits of the growing global economy should be made available to the women workforce. At the same time, measures are required to provide a safe working environment, especially in the informal economy and rural areas. In addition to education, employment is also an important source of empowerment for women. Employment, particularly for cash and in the formal sector, can empower women by providing financial independence. As women become financially better-off, their self confidence increases and this indirectly leads to their empowerment. Women's employment, however, varies due to several different variables that are also related to each other such as education, wealth, age and marital status.

The recent initiatives of the Government apparently exhibit the commitment of the policy makers for deeply looking into this area. This still remains an area of concern for the Government and the society.

#### **2.2.4 Poverty**

The issue of poverty is associated with poor education, no or insufficient employment and restricted opportunities for growth among others. All development policies of the Government have tried to address the issue of poverty since independence. There have been attempts by the Government to address these issues through various plans / programmes. Some of the recent attempts of the Government have been in the form of focused employment guarantee schemes, technical training support for better employment, vocational trainings etc. However, despite plans and strategies, we have large number of people below the poverty line. For a sustained development of the Society and the Nation, the policy makers have to pay more attention to eradication of poverty. The planning of budgetary allocations must take care of the concerns of the poor. This has been very vividly put forth by Mehta, NCW (2003) and Mehta, (2006). The Author has established link between poverty and gender. The study indicates that the majority of India's poor are women and girls. It is suggested that the State should work for increasing the availability of work and fair remuneration to address the issue. The cycle of poverty and gender inequality need to be broken by providing work related skills to women. Simultaneously, the need to provide social safety nets to poor, linking the poor with employment generating projects, networks and support groups etc have been identified as steps to tackle the issue . The emphasis is on the need to decide priorities in budgetary allocations based on a holistic picture.

#### **2.2.5 Disaster Management**

The issue regarding role of women in disaster management has gained attention only recently. The occurrence of disasters has been increasing in the recent past all over the world. The impact that Tsunami and massive earthquake in Gujarat have made on the society has brought the realization that it is an area that needs further attention and focused approach. Studies have shown that disaster affects women and men differently, as they carry and exhibit different coping mechanisms. Thorat, (2008), has discussed the

issue in detail. It has been brought out by studies that the work pattern for women changes after a disaster, which suggests that disasters increase women's responsibilities in the domestic sphere and may displace their employment apart from disintegrating their community. Sexual and domestic violence against girls and women in a disaster is expected to rise. Due to the sudden and drastic changes in the environmental, politico-economic, social and cultural conditions, gender relations may take different forms.

Thus the impacts of natural disasters on women and men are required to be studied in detail before framing any policy framework. While making policies and designing disaster recovery programmes and trying to allocate resources for disasters, the gender perspective should be incorporated. Gender needs are required to be integrated in disaster research, planning and implementation.

The above listed concerns are only a glimpse of the variety and dimensions of issues. In reality the issues are too many and covering a wide canvas. To quote Mehta, (2006) – "Women's priorities are not restricted to the so-called 'women's issues' and in-fact, extend to all development issues." Numerous studies have shown that the women feel concerned about various needs of family and society equally – be it their needs for drinking water, drainage, public infrastructure, security, houses for the poor, administration, a maternity hospital or food security & nutrition and self employment for women i.e. almost the entire gamut of the development issues. It may be appreciated by the policy makers also that all the areas of concerns are so interlinked that they can not be seen and tackled in isolation. There are wide ranging inter-connections between all the aspects of human development. Both gender inequality and educational backwardness are crucial factors responsible for under nutrition. NFHS-3 observations suggest that while low levels of education do little to enable women's employment, higher levels contribute to women's increased labour force participation. Women's education has emerged in many empirical investigations as one of the most key determinants of child health. Therefore, a well integrated and comprehensive approach is required to address the issues of gender inequality.

## 2.3 Millennium Development Goals-Gender Concerns

The Government has further reiterated its gender concerns and priorities by its commitment for bringing about definite improvement in some selected areas through the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Declaration of the United Nations set 2015 as the time line for achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which provide quantitative benchmarks for eradication of extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and diseases, along with achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. India is one of the 192 countries that have made a commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. From Table No. 2.1, it may be seen that Goal 3 has an explicit focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. The fifth goal addresses gender based disadvantages of women as it targets at improving maternal health. MDG 3 measures gender parity in education; the share of women in wage employment and the proportion of seats held by women in National Legislatures. Each of these three indicators with regard to education, employment and political participation are considered essential for the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Table No 2.1**

### **MDG targets for India**

<b>Target No.</b>	<b>Target Description</b>	<b>Goal to which relates</b>
1.	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, proportion of population below national poverty line	Goal 1
2.	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Goal 1
3.	Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education	Goal 2
4.	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education not later than 2015	Goal 3
5.	Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under five mortality rate	Goal 4
6.	Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	Goal 5

7.	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV / AIDS	Goal 6
8.	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	Goal 6
9.	Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources	Goal 7
10.	Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation	Goal 7
11.	By 2020, to have achieved, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	Goal 7
12.	In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication	Goal 8

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Central Statistical Organization, (2009), "Millennium Development Goals India country report, Mid Term Statistical Appraisal"

## 2.4 Miscellaneous Issues

If the gender perspectives are kept in view, there are many more examples that can be quoted where women have been directly or indirectly affected. All these are areas to be addressed by appropriate policy interventions, sooner or later. Some of the illustrative examples, taken from the report Mehta and Krishnan, (2007), are described here –

- i. Making kerosene freely available to women at accessible outlets and affordable prices will be highly beneficial for their health and will also save time.
- ii. In the context of providing safe fuel for cooking, there is a need for encouraging non conventional energy sources like bio-gas and other bio fuels, which will reduce the drudgery of collecting fuel.
- iii. With the increasing trend of globalization and liberalization of economy, men are migrating to urban areas for jobs and women are participating in activities of agriculture sector in a large number. Therefore, there is an urgent need to ensure that women are given land rights, women friendly tools and equipment, access to quality seeds, fertilizers, micro credit, fair agro-product pricing, subsidized procurement structures and other such mechanisms.

- iv. The newly promoted Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are going to be hubs for the industrial and manufacturing sector, providing jobs to lakhs of people. The effect on women farmers needs special consideration if farmland is acquired for SEZ.
- v. If women are to be mainstreamed into the growing manufacturing sector, women-friendly facilities at work sites such as crèches, water and sanitation facilities, maternity leave and also paternity leave and sexual harassment cells need to be put in place.
- vi. Access to clean toilets and water in both urban and rural areas and making arrangements to keep these clean is a major gender issue. It has to be given priority.

The priorities listed/ documented in the planning process documents or MDGs are not static, but highly dynamic. The Government has to continuously review and monitor the policy formulation, implementation, budgetary allocation, policy updating etc. The entire prioritization requires further analysis, for identification of needs and priorities of women, (especially for poor and marginalized otherwise), shortcomings of existing policies, programmes and schemes to determine whether or not they meet the priorities. It is to be accepted by the policy makers and the society both that women's needs can not be kept invisible and the issues are not confined to a small number. They require inter sectoral convergence. There are gender implications in every sector and there is immense potential for gender budgeting in almost every sector of the economy.

In the light of these identified gender concerns, an attempt is being made in this dissertation to analyse the Union Government's budgetary allocations, for the last five years, with a gender lens. The current study proposes to limit itself in looking into the concerns in three areas only namely health, education and employment.