



Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Special reference to Rajasthan

Dr. Amita Chawadha

Assistant Professor ,Department of Sociology

JNVU, Jodhpur.

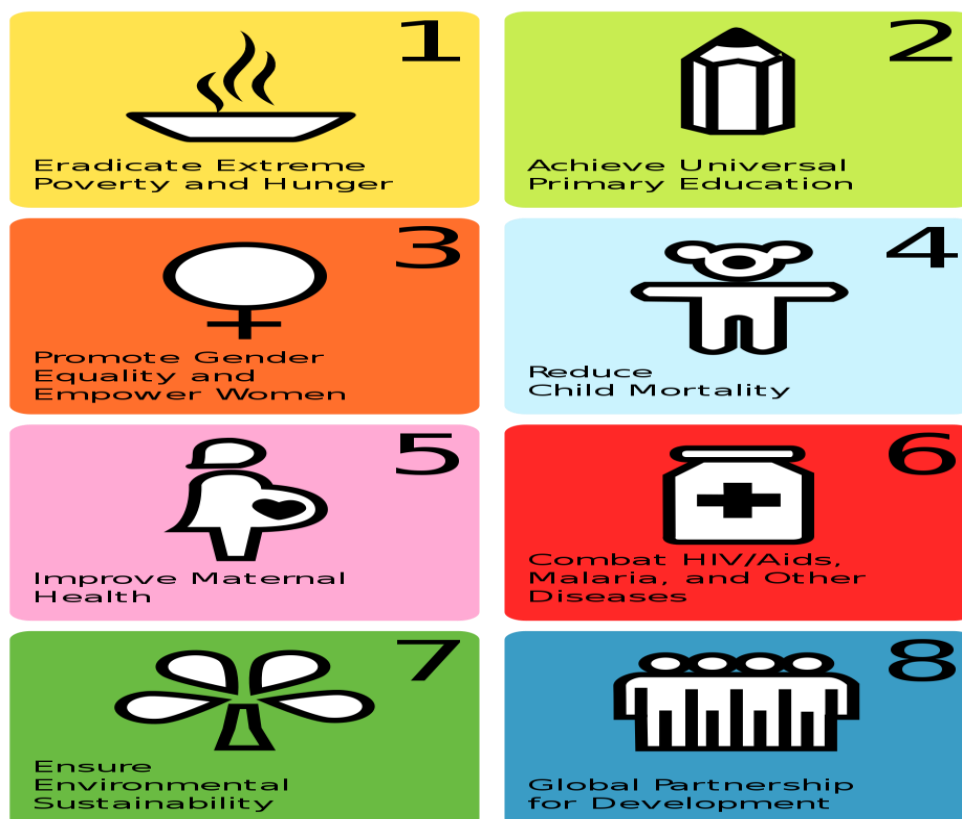
The Human race is a two-winged bird, one wing is female and the other one is male. It will not be able to fly, if both wings are not equally developed. No nation can rise to the height of glory unless women are side by side. They constitute almost half of the total population, but still their situation has been grey. Their life lies between pleasures at one end and danger at the other end. Although, physically both men and women share the same space but women always have been treated unequal in every society and India as well as Rajasthan is not an exception.

The Human Development Report 1995 developed two indicators to measure gender disparities; these are Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The first one focuses on the inequalities in education, health and access to resources. A computation of the GDI for the Indian states tells not only low levels of human development and the extent of gender inequalities within India, but also badly performs with the rest of the world. The second one measures the degree to which women and men command economic, professional and political power. It is measured by three indicators: per capita income, share in professional, technical, managerial and administrative jobs and share in parliamentary seats. Though, caste, community, access to fuel and fodder, control over land and other assets, inheritance rights, and violence and the threat of violence also have a direct bearing on women's status, but do not get reflected in the GEM.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment both have been clearly recognised as vigorous not only to the social, economic and political well-being of civilised societies, but also as main elements in socio-economic development. Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WE-GE) are also being reviewed as both are closely related and integral part of this research topic. It is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of which India is a signatory. The CEDAW calls for government to remove all discriminatory barriers against women in all fields particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields. The Millennium Declaration, as a statement of values, principles and objectives for the international agenda of the 21st Century, set time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating discrimination against women. The Road Map for implementing the Declaration has been issued by the UN Secretariat, focusing

on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are shaping the agenda for global and national policy development (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2007) These eight MDGs are following:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empower women
4. To reduce child mortality
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development



Women have not actively participated in their own emancipation due to their lack of economic independence and rampant illiteracy. Therefore, The George Foundation decided to address this important issue of women's empowerment in India by raising the status of women in Hosur Taluk through economic empowerment and education (Deshpande and Sethi 2010). In India around two centuries social reformers and missionaries have tried to bring women out of limitations. We need to think big and scale up rapidly in each and every area; it may be education, infrastructure, industry, financial services or equality of both genders.

Gender equality has become impossible for Indian psyche due to their strong bond with traditions. But efforts have been taken to reverse this situation from both sectors government as well as non-government. Gendered self-image is developed by the process of socialization of both men and women since childhood and carries these stereotypes till their death. They bring up with them such a mental set which do not permit them either to perceive the reality properly or even to think otherwise. Susan B Anthony believed *"Equality won't be complete until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers"*.

Women do not enjoy freedoms, equalities and privileges on par with their male counterparts and have lower status than men in all over the world. Hillary Clinton said "Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world." Amitabh Bachchan's statement seems correct that "Because you are women, people will force their thinking on you, their boundaries on you. They will tell you how to dress, how to behave, who you can meet and where you can go. Don't live in the shadows of people's judgment. Make your own choices in the light of your own wisdom". Thus, there is a shift to change the position and status of women from 'welfare' to 'development' to 'empowerment' to 'human development' approaches has been taken place.

Gender Inequality is one of the most crucial disparities in all societies. Inequality lies in women's access to education, health, physical and financial resources and opportunities available to men and women in the political, economic, social and cultural field. It begins from the journey of life, with female infants having a lower chance of survival than male infants. It continues as the child grows older first in the form of smaller rations of food and nutrition and later in the form of fewer schooling opportunities relative to boys. Further it can be seen when they enter in the economic activities, they also face discrimination, primarily in the form of lower wages. Though it is decreasing in Rajasthan during last decade but its rate is very slow.

India suffers from acute economic and social disparities along with regional, rural-urban, social and gender lines. India stands far below in gender related files. Situation is the same in most of the districts of Rajasthan also, but there is successive decrease in some developed districts. Indian society is pre-dominated

by men; therefore women are a victim of male domination in the every sphere of life. They are also not enjoying the independence and self-dependence due to their dependency on male. Before marriage a girl has to under the influence of her father and brother, after marriage her dependence moves to her husband and later on it goes to her son. Means in the journey of life women never ever feel liberty.

Although women in India feel proud to display that they are well protected and pampered by their husbands without realizing that they are making themselves helpless. Their economic literacy is so low that they cannot play any role in a family's decision regarding the family's budget, savings and investments. Dependent women are not empowered women. If modern women think that they are empowered, it's a myth for them. Empowerment means to inspire women with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs, patterns and societal or religious conditions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to realize their true beauty and power. They should have political, legal, economic and health awareness, knowledge about support groups and positive attitudes towards life. They should get goals for future and strive to achieve them with courage.

Rajasthan is the largest State of India area wise, with a total geographical area of 3,42,239 square kilometres, is situated in the North-west part of the country. It was formed as a state of the Union of India in March 1949, by a fusion of 19 Principalities and 2 Chiefships, with Ajmer-Merwara being added in 1956, as recommended by the States' Reorganisation Commission. It is divided into six zones cover 33 Districts, 237 blocks and 41,353 villages. The state is mainly rural with 80 percent of the population is depending on agriculture for livelihood.

The population of Rajasthan is 6.86 crores in 2011, an increase from 5.65 crores in 2001 census. It forms 5.66 percent of India in 2011, while it was 5.49 in 2001. The population growth in this decade is 21.31 percent. The population density is 165 persons per sq. km. (as against the national average of 312). The decadal growth rate of the state is 28.41 percent (against 21.54 percent of the country), and the population of the state continues to grow at a rate much faster than the national rate. (United Nation Development Programme 2002)

Historically Rajasthan has been a patriarchal feudal and conservative society where gender discrimination has been a concern. A strong son preference exists in this region and high rates of female infanticide and female feticide plague the area. A strong need for women empowerment is evident considering the present status of Rajasthan's women. This has drastically affected women's education, health, financial status and political involvement. The problems are further serious by high levels of seasonal migration.

Migration is required since rural parts of Rajasthan often lack a sufficient economy to provide income for a family year-round. Women are commonly left behind to care and provide for the entire household.

The Constitution Framers envisaged the secondary status of women in Rajasthan coupled with an oppressive caste system and never-ending poverty has attacked the women's rights and a life of dignity. Women of Rajasthan are viewed as an economic burden for their natal home as well as marital home. Indistinctness of women's work and lack of negotiating power has contributed to the continuation of negative image in the family and society. Rajasthan had woman as chief minister as well as governor but incidents of atrocities are high against her. They still face both physical assault and mental harassment in a number of ways.

Women fare worse than men in most of the national, inter-national social indicators. The Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender Development Index (GDI) have been calculated as a possible basis for identifying critical parameters and to help further improve resource allocation decisions. Being pure numbers they have the advantage of being easily comparable, and therefore provide district-level criteria for outlays as well as benchmarks to be improved upon. Information derived from the calculations of HDI and GDI is the basis for moving from analysis to action. The HDI is reduced downwards or adjusted for gender inequality, so that a high GDI value indicates lesser inequality while a low GDI value would mean lower achievement levels for women in the three basic sectors health, education and access to resources.

Rajasthan witnessed a growth of HDI from 0.3983 in 1991 to 0.5709 in 2001 at a total value of 1st and the all-India ranking improved from 11th in 1991 to 9th in 2001. The ranking was for fifteen states in the country. The contributing factors in the improvement of HDI have been different in both the decades. During 1981-91, the main contributor was growth in incomes while during 1991-2001 it was growth in education and literacy (UNDP 2002).

Most of the districts in Rajasthan have low HDI values. Ganganagar has the highest HDI (0.656), followed by Hanumangarh (0.644), Kota (0.613), and Jaipur (0.607). Less developed districts, with HDI values less than or equal to 0.5, are Dungarpur (0.456), Barmer (0.461), Banswara (0.472), and Jalore (0.500). Unlike other states, where the range of variation between districts is quite significant, the districts of Rajasthan do not show wide differences. This characteristic emerges also from the district level analysis of the poverty and income estimates. Thus, not only the most backward districts, but also the state as a whole requires a renewed commitment of human and financial resources to improve the status of women as well as human development.

The Rajasthan government's various programmes for women empowerment such as Swashakti, Swayamsidha, Streeshakti, Balikasamrudhiyojana and another numerous projects reveal that little has been done or achieved through these programmes. The patterns of resource mobilization by government also have significant effects on women that are usually not recognized. This is not only because the consumption of such items may be reduced but also because the provisioning of such items is frequently considered to be the responsibility of the women of the household.

The state government has started to address the gender issues with an attempt to promote the wellbeing of women through various policies and programmes. The Government brought out the document Women's Development Project (WDP) in Rajasthan in May 1984. It was one of the revolutionary negotiations for women's empowerment in the state and is being implemented in all districts of the state. It was probably the first policy declaration by the state government on the situation of women in Rajasthan. It would plan its strategies to change the welfare approach to women's issues to mainstreaming women in the development process. Its aim is to generate awareness on the social evils such as dowry, child marriage, AIDS etc.

The first phase of WDP (1984 to 1990) was a very successful phase when the entire empowerment process was defined and refined. It was the period when the selection of saathins and prachetas and their training started showing the path that could be undertaken for empowerment of rural women. The actual concept of the saathin as an individual change agent got lost in newly developing experiments with groups and self-help groups. The second phase of this programme initiated after 1990 and by then it had been accepted politically and the government had decided to extent it all over the state. The success stories of programme started to spread not only in other parts of the country but also outside the country.

The WDP has successfully demonstrated a paradigm shift from women as objects of welfare schemes to active participants. This model has shown that awareness-building and group-formation among rural women is possible and that it can be effective. Rural women have realized that they can be empowered to change their fortunes. It has actively answered of a challenge to make women an integral part of the mainstream development. The efforts in this direction envisaged bringing about a pivotal shift in societal attitudes, making for a gender-equitable sharing of opportunities, resources and power in all aspects of human life. This approach has been successful in demonstrating that sathins are effective in bringing about empowerment amongst rural women. Thus there is a need to consolidate and build upon these. MahilaSamooch approach at this crucial juncture may lead to a loss of gains from the past.

The promotion of women SHGs has been scaled up in the state through the Department of Women and Child Development. The vision statement of the Department states that we imagine a Rajasthan where

every poor woman has access to micro finance services as a means to social and economic empowerment for improving her life.

The Government of Rajasthan announced the Rajasthan State Policy for Women in March 2000. The policy was seen as an instrument for bringing gender issues centre stage in development planning. It covered adequate ground to focus on the various needs of women in the state. It also stated that an integrated approach would be required as woman is not isolated from the other. Nevertheless, many of the policy commitments are yet to be operationalized implicitly.

The plan of gender mainstreaming has been taken forward with the establishment of institutional mechanisms like State Commission for women, Mahilathanas, setting up of sexual harassment committees under the Vishakha Judgment within government institutions, entry of women into Panchayats and gender sensitisation training programmes. Besides that there are some programmes such as the ICDS, the Saathin scheme, SHGs, Joint Forest Management (women's sub-committee of the Village Forest Protection and Management Committee) etc. are assist in women empowerment. There are also some NGOs like GraminVikasVigyanSamiti (GRAVIS), Society Uplift to Rural Economy (SURE), Uttari Rajasthan Cooperative Milk Union Limited (URMUL) Trust etc., bring women together to address the key issues faced by women particularly rural. It is possibility to meet and build upon existing efforts towards strengthening women's organisations and raise status of women. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) has been a more recent initiative and it is also known to be an extremely effective tool for mainstreaming gender and promoting women's empowerment. GRB carry out six departments namely Women and Child Development, Health, Education, Social Welfare, Registration and Stamps, and Agriculture.

Rajasthan presents an alarming challenge, as well as opportunities to innovate, for national and international partners in development. Similar challenges and opportunities are posed by the Gender Equity Sensitive Index namely the GDI. Ganganagar (0.596) and Hanumangarh (0.590) display high GDI values, while Dholpur presents a shocking contrast with a GDI value of 0.269. These complex measures and their disaggregated components serve as alternative benchmarks of the status of human well-being in the districts, and help in inter-sectorial and inter-district priorities for action. The Rajasthan Human Development Report draws the map of the status and role of people at the centre stage of development. The report is a standard document on several shared and interrelated concerns about human development. It shows the commitment of State to Sustainable Human Development.

Gender equality is addressed by the Commission on the Status of Women of ECOSOC and several governmental and non-governmental organizations (Ricardo 2012). Gender equality produces a double

dividend because it benefits both women and children. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident children. Through gender equality not only women can live full and productive lives, but they can also improve the lives of their children, their families, and the society (UNICEF 2007).

The Cairo conference on Population and Development organized by UN in 1994 called attention to women empowerment as a central focus. It called for advancing gender equality and empowerment of women, the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's fertility as the keystones of population and development related programmes. The UNDP Human Development Report 1995 was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered.

Generally, women empowerment can be measured by three indicators namely women's security, decision-making power, and mobility. These three indicators are significantly low in India particularly for rural and less educated women. Decision-making power among employed urban women is higher than that of rural and less educated women. Older married women had more decision-making power than the younger married women. Younger women and girls experience an additional level of discrimination due to their age.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives, communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. It means giving better opportunities to disadvantaged people to do something about their living conditions, and helping them via-counseling, proper training, capacity building to understand more clearly the context of their lives and work. Empowerment is must wherever inequalities in the share-out of knowledge, power and resources prevent individuals, groups of individuals, social strata or entire countries from improving their quality of life with autonomy and in an independent and focused manner (Oxaal 1997).

Women Empowerment is closely related to the Status of Women. Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power (Government of India 2001). According to the Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus the word "Empowerment" means give power or Authorize or license. According to the Cambridge International Dictionary, the "Empowerment" means to give (someone) the official legal authority or freedom to do something. It has also been defined as a process geared to raise women's individual and collective awareness about the ways in which power relations affect their lives, while facilitating them to achieve self-confidence and nurturing their strength to challenge gender inequalities.

Empowerment of women is the essential for transformation of a developing country into a developed country. Women Empowerment is most vital system to strengthen the future of women in India. It is a well-organized approach which needs to develop more seriously. The Government of India came up in the new

millennium by announcing the year 2001 as “Women’s Empowerment Year”. This process has been further accelerated with some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious about profound discrimination in family as well as public life.

Women empowerment is determined by women’s involvement in decision making, change in women’s status, self-confidence level, social and political participation, control over income, awareness of social issues and problems, and family relationship and the decreased degree of domestic violence. It would become more relevant if women are educated, better informed and can take rational decisions. A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality. Empowerment of women may be defined as an increasing participation control and responsibility of women in various aspects may be social, economic, legal and political that affects their lives (Yunus 1997).

Generally, women’s empowerment can be measured in the terms of women’s sense of self-worth, women’s ability to influence or make decisions that affect their lives and their futures, their right to have the power of control their own lives both within and outside home, their ability to influence the direction of social change by creates a just social and economic order, self-confidence, economic participation in the workforce, representation in decision-making structures both formal and informal, and their engagement in formulation of policies affecting the socio-economic groups in which they live, educational attainment as it is the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women, their health requirements must including access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities and their social and cultural rights that enabling them to exercise full socio-economic and political rights includes recognizing and respecting the rights of women to live with dignity, free from violence and discrimination.

Economic Empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Economic participation along with educational attainment is the key elements in ensuring the empowerment of women. It may create an opportunity for women to earn independent and contributes the household economy, social and political participation. Largely it brings changes in their role expectations in the community and society and also helps in their personality development. It also gives them exposure to outside world and increases their mobility outside home, self-esteem, self-confidence, social recognition and status that ultimately contributes to women empowerment.

Political Empowerment of women enhances their social status through women participation in political process at the grass root level. It also helps to solve the local problems, particularly drinking water, health, education, child development, social security for aged, disabled and in grass root level planning. It

can be assessed by their participation in meetings, election as contestants as well as voters and independent voting

Social Empowerment of women is a gradual process, a collective effort of economic and political empowerment but without social empowerment it is very difficult to achieve the both. The indicators of social empowerment are social interaction with outsiders and confidence to fight against injustice and problems. It can be assessed by their moving to other places independently without the support of male members, expression of their views in family as well as in groups, interaction with outers, boldness in participating protests against alcohol, abuse by male members of the family, environmental pollution, drinking water problem, dowry related problems and abuse of women by their husbands and participation in rallies for social issues.

Role of Five Year Plans in Women Advancement

There has been a progressive increase in the plan expenditures to meet the requirements of women particularly. In the First Plan the expense was of Rs. 4 crores has increased to Rs. 7,810.42 crores in the Ninth Five Year Plan, and Rs. 13,780 crores in the Tenth Five Year Plan. There has been a shift from “welfare” oriented approach in the First Five Year Plan to “development” and “empowerment” of women in the sequential Five Year Plans.

- ❖ The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was focused on providing equal status to women. It was mainly welfare oriented as far as women’s issues were concerned. The aim of this plan was to organize various welfare activities and prioritizing women’s education. A number of welfare measures have been started by the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) through the voluntary sector. The National Extension Service Programmes (NESP) implemented the programmes for women through Community Development Blocks.
- ❖ Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961) was geared to organise “MahilaMandals” at grass-roots levels to ensure better implementation of welfare schemes particularly for women.
- ❖ Third, Fourth, Fifth Year Plans (1961-1980) has given high priority to women’s education. Measures to and other Interim improve maternal and child health services, and supplementary Plans (1961-74) were also introduced feeding for children, nursing and hoping mothers.
- ❖ Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) is viewed as a landmark in the development of women. A multidisciplinary approach was adopted in it. The fifth and sixth plans shifted the approach to the overall development of women with thrust on health, education and employment of women.

- ❖ Seventh Five Year (1985-90) Development programmes for women were continued, with the objective of raising their socio-economic status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. There was a very noteworthy step to identify and promote “beneficiary-oriented programmes” which extended direct benefits to women.
- ❖ Eighth Five Year (1992-97) makes an effort to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors did not bypass women. This plan stressed on women empowerment, recommending 30% reservation for women in the membership of government local bodies that enabled women to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental process. This approach marks a definite shift from Development to Empowerment of women.
- ❖ The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) ratifies empowerment of women, promoting and developing people’s participatory institutions like Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), cooperatives and Self-Help Groups (SHG), strengthening efforts to build self-reliance, the coming together of services from different sectors and a women’s component plan at the central and state levels. This plan aimed at ensuring a minimum of 30% of benefits to women from all ministries and departments. It has the nine specific objectives and empowerment of women became one of the nine specific objectives (Government of India 2002).
- ❖ Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) was formulated to ensure necessary access of women to information, resources and services, and advance gender equality goals. This plan called for a threefold strategy of social empowerment, economic development and providing Gender Justice.
- ❖ Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) carry out special plan measures for gender empowerment and equity. The Ministry of Women and Child Development would make synergistic use of gender budget and gender mainstreaming process. This plan targeted in extending 33% benefits to women and girl children directly and indirectly. The positive things of the efforts have expressed in an increase in the female literacy rate of 39.29% to 54.16% in 1991 and 2001 census respectively (Government of India 2001).
- ❖ Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) is also emphasis on gender equality and women empowerment through equal access on resources and participation.

There is a most visible gap in policy and practice in the betterment of status of women in India. One key factor for this gap is the patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in both rural and urban India. Another gap is the inaccessibility of information on victims’ rights mainly among rural and less educated women. Corruption widened the gap in enforcement of laws and sentencing of perpetrators is

long and difficult process. Furthermore, social stigma and the fear of rejection by the family play a big role in women and girls' ability or inability to access laws and policies to address sexual and physical violence.

Despite the constitutional provisions, policies, laws and initiatives by civil society institutions, violence against women is widespread in India. Formulating laws is not enough but effective steps are required to strictly enforce them. Even many People still never thought the need of equal rights of women with men's in making decisions on political, economic and other issues. We need to rethink concepts and strategies for promoting women's dignity and rights. The society prerequisites open discussion of traditions and customs with participation of both men and women in the way that will allow bettering protecting women's rights.

The women can get back their rightful place in society if law is properly imposed to check male-superiority. The State requires a fully-fledged mechanism to ensure gender sensitive policy and implementation through a participatory apex body. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage or family, no ward or stick is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless women are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. It is important to educate the women. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society.

A society where ideas of men superiority is predominant can only be altered by change in state authority and mentality of men as well as women, formulating and implementing strong laws etc. There should be a strong determination among every man that every woman should be honored only then empowerment will be realized in its true meaning. Robert Kennedy said "The glory of justice and the majesty of law are created not just by the Constitution nor by the courts, nor by the officers of the law, nor by the lawyers, but by the men and women who constitute our society, who are the protectors of the law as they are themselves protected by the law".

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