

RESURRECTING THE FEMINIST GENIUS Striving for Creativity, Capability and Leadership Everyday

Kiran Prasad[♦]

Abstract: Despite rapid economic growth in the post-reform period and all the flagship programmes of the government, India ranks very low on narrowing the gender gap in education, health, and economic participation. India is among the few countries of the world where female labour force participation is shrinking with less than 15% in any form of paid work. Though there have been several efforts to improve the status of women there is a wide gender gap in education, health, economic participation and social equality. Women's development and empowerment must become the long-term focus of policies to raise the consciousness of families, increase women's self-confidence, provide education and strengthen legal justice for fostering gender equality. Sustainable development in India can be a reality only when there is gender equality and justice based development that accords top priority to the welfare of women.

Keywords: Feminist Genius, Gender Inequality, Leadership, Violence against Women, Women's Empowerment.

1. Introduction

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing."
Swami Vivekananda

[♦]**Dr Kiran Prasad**, Professor of Communication and Journalism, Sri Padmavati Mahila University, Andhra Pradesh, was a Commonwealth Research Fellow at the Centre for International Communication Research, University of Leeds, UK and Canadian Studies Research Fellow at Carleton University, Canada. She has published twenty-two books including *Gender and ICTs: Bridging the Digital Divide* (2016), *Transforming International Communication: Media, Society and Culture in the Middle East* (2014), *New Media and Pathways to Social Change: Shifting Development Discourses* (2013), *Media Law in India* (2011).

The status of women is one of the pressing contemporary development concerns at the international as well as the national levels. Historically though women enjoyed a respected position in the ancient cultures of India, Persia and Greece, over time the situation has been drastically altered and women were isolated from major developments that led to the modernization and autonomy especially in many developing countries. In India, women constitute a population of 586.5 million with 405.2 million (48.6 per cent) in the rural areas and 181.2 million in the urban areas.⁶

India recorded a high economic growth of 9 per cent per annum during 2005-06 to 2008-09. In 2016, India climbed 16 places from 55th place to the 39th rank on the Global Competitiveness Index prepared by the World Economic Forum with the economy characterized by improved business sophistication and goods market efficiency.⁷ This remarkable economic achievement has yet to be translated into human development for half of India's population. India ranks at 132 out of 146 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, which reflects the dismal status of women.

In rural India, where teenage marriages are common, women face insecurity regarding a regular income, food, shelter and access to health care. It is an understatement to say that violence against women is multidimensional; it is structural, brutal and a part of everyday life.⁸ Indian women marry at a median age of just 17 years and 16 percent of women aged 15-19 have already started bearing children, according to the 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey.⁹ With 212 per 100,000 live births India

⁶Census of India, Registrar General of India, New Delhi: Government of India, 2011.

⁷World Economic Forum, *Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016.

⁸Shamika Ravi and Anuradha Sajjanhar, "Beginning a New Conversation on Women," *The Hindu*, 21 June 2014, 9.

⁹International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-06: India: Volume II*, Mumbai: IIPS, 2007, 39.

ranks among the countries with the highest Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) accounting for one-third of maternal deaths in 2015 worldwide.¹⁰ It was estimated that every year, 78,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth even though 75 per cent of these deaths can be prevented by health care.¹¹ India is ranked 170 out of 185 countries in the prevalence of anaemia among women (48% women are anaemic) and has the highest rate of malnourished children in the world at 44 per cent and stands at 114/132 in stunted growth of children with 38.7% incidence.¹²

The National Crime Records Bureau estimates that over 20,000 young mothers, mainly housewives, commit suicide every year making them the largest demographic group in India to commit suicide followed by farmers.¹³ The triggers for these deaths range from an unplanned pregnancy to an abusive or alcoholic husband, pressures to have a male child and hormonal changes among others. The Programme for Improving Mental Health Care (PRIME) project in Madhya Pradesh is an intervention programme for neo-natal depression related problems, where all expecting mothers are screened.¹⁴ There is hardly any recognition of the pressure and depression of motherhood; many young women are automatically expected to care for their child and their personal health in India.

Gender discrimination and violence against women have had a profound effect on the sex ratio in India. The sex ratio has been dropping steadily for the past 50 years. In 2011 the sex ratio of females stood at 940 females per 1000 males, the lowest ratio

¹⁰Registrar General of India, *Maternal Mortality Rates*, New Delhi: Government of India, 2009.

¹¹Jisha Krishnan, "Dying to Be a Mother", *The Week*, 12 September 2010, 16-24.

¹²United Nations Fund for Population Activities, *Global Nutrition Report 2016*, UNFPA 2016.

¹³Amba Batra Bakshi, "Depression after Childbirth a Silent Killer in India," 12 July 2016 <<http://everylifecounts.ndtv.com/depression-childbirth-silent-killer-india-3673?pfrom=home-environment>> (17 July 2016).

¹⁴Bakshi, "Depression after Childbirth a Silent Killer in India."

after independence.¹⁵ These human development indices show that India has failed to convert its economic growth to transform the lives of women and children who are among the most vulnerable population.

In the light of persistent inequality of women, the gender equality survey of the World Economic Forum¹⁶ places India at 114 out of 142 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index. While India ranks 126 on educational attainment, it is ranked 134 on economic participation and opportunity and the lowest at 142 on the health and survival of women. Contrary to the popular notion that men are the main breadwinners of the family, according to the 2011 Census, about 27 million households, constituting 11 per cent of total households in the country, are headed by women, often among the poorest. Though many of these women lack formal education and employment skills, their courage to face adversities and steer their families out of poverty goes unrecognized by policy makers and development planners in the country.

There is an avowed strategy of women's empowerment that focuses on women's education and employment. But what is shocking is that studies indicate a link between women's employment and domestic violence. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3)¹⁷ data report that there is much higher prevalence of violence against women who were employed at any time in the past 12 months (40 per cent) than women who were not employed (29 per cent). Studies give evidence that women who have more education than their husbands, who earn more, or who are the sole earners in their families have a higher likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence than women who are not employed or who are less educated than

¹⁵Registrar General of India, *Census of India*, New Delhi: Government of India, 2011.

¹⁶World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Index 2014*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2014.

¹⁷International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06: India: Volume II*, 2007.

their spouse.¹⁸ This reality in India contradicts the widely held global perception that better economic status of women lowers their risk to marital violence.

It is astonishing that women are achievers and geniuses when their very survival is under threat on a daily basis. The enormous physical and psychological pressure of competing in an 'equal world' with men who do not experience even a fraction of the constraints is a lived experience for many capable women in leadership positions. The feminist genius lies in the striving for creativity and capability by women who are projected as emblems of modernization and emancipation on one hand but muted by the patriarchal oppression that reinforces male domination that overrides these 'progressive' images.¹⁹

The feminist movement grew out of a sense of outrage at such treatment of women, for ending several forms of harassment of women, violence, sexual exploitation, job discrimination, exclusion from public life and unequal educational opportunities. Society is reluctant to concede that women's rights are an inalienable dimension of human rights. The deliberate eclipsing of women from public affairs led to the struggle for equality, social participation and legitimate share of autonomy and status enjoyed by their male counterparts. There is a need for restructuring development paradigms to include the perspectives of women.

2. Feminist Movement

The women's movement has had to contend with several situations and idealized stereotypes dictated by cultural and traditional norms that existed during its early days and continues to persist. Virginia Woolf's writings presented the

¹⁸Shagun Sabarwal, K. G. Santhya and Shireen Jejeebhoy, "Women's Autonomy and Experience of Physical Violence within Marriage in Rural India: Evidence from a Prospective Study," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2013, 4.

¹⁹Kiran Prasad, "Young Women and the Modernity Project: Realities and Problems of Media Regulation in India," *Journal of International Communication*, 15(1), 2009, 9-25.

obstacles that prevented women from attaining self-reliance and a distinct identity. Woolf explains that it was impossible for women to develop creativity without minimum independence and personal space.²⁰ She argued that if young men as inheritors of the family fortunes were encouraged to fend for themselves and carve a niche in the world, women fell behind as servants and possessions, with strict socialization patterns ingrained in them. They had no space or time to call their own and could not write down their thoughts and experiences even if they had a chance at the minimal education accorded to them. Women continue to struggle to seek the freedom to express their choices, however simple, in their daily life and continue to grapple with the question of creating space for themselves within their lives:

Feminism, however, is not only about achieving social justice, it is also about creating a space which allows women to become something other than how they have been traditionally defined by men. Women, against the odds, are attempting to balance autonomy and dependence; self-fulfilment and a desire and obligation to care for others. In the present climate, as hurdle after hurdle remains in their way, they are encouraged to blame themselves – instead of examining how and why the hurdles were constructed in the first place.²¹

The feminist genius lies in crossing these hurdles at a cost seldom known to the outside world and in many cases unknown to even their own families.

Friedan²² adopted a sociological approach and met housewives isolated in their urban apartments and homes striving to live up to the stereotyped and traditional roles and attempting to transform their houses into shining models portrayed by soap and floor-wax commercials. Women in the

²⁰Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own", 1929 <<http://uah.edu/woolf/chrono.html>> (15 May 2016).

²¹Yvonne Roberts, "Pre-feminism Is Alive and Well," *The Hindu*, 3 August 2004.

²²Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York: Dell Publishing, 1963.

developing countries of Asia and Africa find themselves in a "dichotomizing trap"²³ in which researchers and policy analysts envision women as either 'traditional' or 'modern' meaning liberated, educated and independent. These images of women have reinforced simplistic ideas about the nature of society, the interpretation of the status of women, and prescriptions for their future.²⁴ The mass media also actively promote the image of a modern 'new woman' as revealed by studies of women in advertising on satellite television in India,²⁵ in China,²⁶ and in Thailand.²⁷ Though the mass media under the influence of Western culture represent women as modern, traditional perceptions and expectations of women's roles in society or family remain deep-rooted, which have continued to influence the way society treats women in several developing countries including India.

Greer²⁸ alerted women to the reality that in spite of having legal, educational and political rights, it would fail to raise their status unless women consciously overcome their childhood conditioning and acculturation as these were the forces that kept them quiescent and denied them justice in societies. Feminist scholarship has evolved over time with a focus on sex differences (the traditional approach) to a focus on improving society and making women more like men (the reformist or

²³David A. Williamson, "The Promise of Change, the Persistence of Inequality: Development, Globalization, Mass Media and Women in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Women, Globalization and Mass Media: International Facets of Emancipation*, Kiran Prasad, ed., New Delhi: The Women Press, 2006, 183-208.

²⁴Williamson, "The Promise of Change, the Persistence of Inequality," 186.

²⁵Kiran Prasad, "Women's Movement and Media Action: Paradoxes and Promises," in *Women and Media: Challenging Feminist Discourse*, ed., Kiran Prasad, New Delhi: The Women Press, 2005, 213-144.

²⁶D. Birch, et al., *Asia Cultural Politics in the Global Age*, Crow Nest: Allen Unwin, 2001.

²⁷Ousa Biggins, "Cultural Imperialism and Thai Women's portrayal on Mass Media" in *Women, Globalization and Mass Media*, 95-112.

²⁸Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1971.

liberal approach), to the current focus of giving voice to women (the radical feminist approach).²⁹

3. Silencing Women

Women's capability as generators of knowledge in all formal education has been vastly eclipsed, what is taught is men's knowledge; the silencing of active theorizing women takes place in almost all education systems.³⁰ In a digital age "if tech is widely seen as a male bastion, it is because women's stories have been deliberately erased."³¹ The fact that the world's first programmer and inventor of scientific computing is Ada Lovelace; the Spanning Tree Protocol for network computing was invented by Radia Perlman and the key designer of Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol was Judith Estrin tells 'the untold stories' about women.³²

The Chief Operating Officer of Facebook Sheryl Sandberg³³ believes that women themselves are largely responsible for not accepting leadership roles as they are socially conditioned to be less ambitious, settle for less and prioritise their homes and families at the cost of their career. Sandberg calls women to 'lean in' to their careers without being guilty about the need to be liked and sacrifice on behalf of the family. Here lies the catch for many creative, capable women geniuses of India. According to the Gender Diversity Benchmark Survey for 2011 and 2014, Indian companies lose 11 per cent of their female workforce

²⁹Brenda Dervin, "The Potential Contribution of Feminist Scholarship to the Field of Communication," *Journal of Communication*, 1987 (37), 107-120.

³⁰Cheris Kramarae, "Feminist Theories of Communication" in *International Encyclopedia of Communication, Volume 2*, G. Gerbner, W. Schramm, T. L. Worth, and L. Gross, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 157-160.

³¹G. Sampath, "Yes, There's Sexism in Science," *The Hindu*, 24 June 2015, 9.

³²Elissa Shevinsky, *Lean Out: The Struggle for Gender Equality in Tech and Start-up Culture*, New York and London: OR Books, 2015.

³³Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

every year as women are haunted by 'daughterly guilt' and 'maternal guilt' that leads them to prioritise caring for parents, children and extended family by leaving their careers.³⁴ Such women are also under pressure to support their husbands to fulfil their family aspirations for a better lifestyle by working from home or getting creative by plunging into entrepreneurship which has its own set of challenges.

The creativity of women lay in circumventing the barriers erected in their social environment to continue performing their duties and lead their families and communities daily by silencing their voices and muting their capabilities putting them under enormous strain. Empowerment of women can be achieved only by enabling women to voice their experiences and for society to understand them as human beings and respond to them with sensitivity. With nations (including India) boasting themselves as nuclear powers, 'space-age countries' and 'information societies' it is unthinkable that any country would burn women alive (for dowry) except in India. But the large-scale brutal violence against girls and women from acid attacks to gang rapes does not seem to touch the hearts of representatives of the people (nearly half of their electorate being women) who remain oblivious to the plight of women. It is estimated that around 30 per cent of the sex workers in India are below eighteen years and many women have been pushed into sex work.³⁵ It is even more shocking that of late several panchayats (especially in North India) have begun to award punishments to women such as approving their sale to criminals, gang rape, excommunication from the village (along with their families) and social boycott by the community. Such local bodies are not instruments of political empowerment, as

³⁴K. Bharat Kumar, "'Daughterly guilt' haunts Indian working women", *The Hindu*, 21 March 2016, 14.

³⁵Niranjan Saggurti, Shagun Sabarwal, Ravi K. Verma, Shiva S. Halli, and Anrudh K. Jain "Harsh Realities: Reasons for Women's Involvement in Sex Work in India," *Journal of AIDS and HIV Research* 3, 9 (2011), 172-179.

presently they seem to be emerging as instruments of oppression against women.

Spender³⁶ documents the silencing or threatening of women by the application of deviancy labels. Women who are particularly knowledgeable, witty, or those who question or rebel against patriarchy, are called aberrations, unnatural, unattractive, unisexual, unnaturally sexed and man-haters. All forms of violence used to silence women – implicit or explicit – restricts women's capability in all spheres and diminishes human development.

4. Muting Women's Capability

Women are under great social control and scrutiny which has restricted what they can say and where and to whom. They are forced to express their subordination through 'feminine' words, voice and syntax. In this context, Ardener³⁷ conceives of women as a 'muted' and men as a 'dominant' group in relation to language, meaning and communication. In patriarchal cultures, men determine the general system of meanings for society and validate these meanings through the support received from other men. These meanings, regarded as correct by men, have evolved out of male experiences. The concepts and vocabulary arising out of it are quite different for women to contend with and express themselves in.³⁸ There are several words in almost every language to describe women who are in disrepute for whatever reason. For instance, to be a 'prostitute' is to be stigmatised for life but the men who are the 'clients' do not suffer in the least from social mores or sanctions that continue to bestow status on them. They enjoy immunity from stigma and abuse which is strengthened by the fact that there are no words

³⁶Dale Spender, *For the Record: The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge*, London: The Women's Press, 1985.

³⁷Edwin Ardener, "Belief and the problems of Women" in *Perceiving Women*, Shirley Ardener ed., 1975, London: Malaby.

³⁸Kiran Prasad, *Philosophies of Communication and Media Ethics: Theory, Concepts and Empirical Issues*, New Delhi: BRPC, 2000.

to describe such immoral men. There can be 'other women' in extra-marital relations but no 'other men'.

The information and communication media concentrate on fashion, glamour, weight reduction, cookery and how to sharpen 'feminine instincts' to keep men and their in-laws happy rather on career opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal aid, counselling services, childcare services and financial management that build women's capacity and leadership. Despite the fact that there is no dearth of women leadership in India, it is rarely recalled that the right to information campaign led by Aruna Roy, the struggle for natural resources led by Medha Patkar, the sustainable agriculture movement led by Vandana Shiva and a host of local agitations led by women like C. K. Janu and Mayilamma have played a stellar role in grounding sustainable development in India.³⁹

Women in India labour under the brunt of oppressive traditions, exploitation, suffer from lack of self-worth or identity, and are routinely subjected to violence even at home. It is absurd that in a country where even women's dress is dictated by tradition, women must take responsibility for family planning, AIDS and a host of other maladies affecting society. Patriarchal structures dictate the degrees to which women must be robed or disrobed; women do not even have complete liberty to decide on their dress. The burkini versus bikini debate has ramifications in India where violence against women is attributed to their dress! Women and society in general are in great need of self-introspection and self-conscientization to overcome the downslide in human values.⁴⁰

³⁹Kiran Prasad, "Environmental Communication from the Fringes to Mainstream: Creating a Paradigm Shift in Sustainable Development" *Sustainable Development and Green Communication: Asian and African Perspectives*, in Jan Servaes ed., Virginia, USA: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 95-109.

⁴⁰Kiran Prasad, "Preface" in *Communication and Empowerment of Women*.

5. Resurrecting the Feminist Genius

There has been a coexistence of feminist development approaches in India – Women In Development (WID), Women And Development (WAD), and Gender And Development (GAD). WID approach was adopted internationally to achieve women's integration in all aspects of the development process. It is based on liberal feminism which generally treats women as a homogeneous group and assumes that gender roles will change as women gain an equal role to men in the development of education, employment, and health services. The WID approach does not question the existing social structures or explore the nature and sources of women's oppression. It fails to consider the implications of race, class and gender on women's oppression.

WAD is primarily a neo-Marxist, feminist approach with a strong emphasis on the importance of social class and the exploitation of the 'Third World'. Affirmative action by the state and pro-active approach by the civil society through NGOs and women's groups are advocated by these models for empowerment of women against the forces of patriarchal class society. The major criticism of the WAD approach is that it fails to undertake a full-scale analysis of the relationship between patriarchy and women's subordination. Although work which women do inside and outside homes is central to development, WAD preoccupies itself with the productive aspect at the expense of the reproductive side of women's work and lives.

The GAD approach recognizes that improvements in women's status require analysis of the relations between men and women, as well as the concurrence and cooperation of men. There is recognition that the participation and commitment of men is required to fundamentally alter the social and economic position of women. A gender-focused approach seeks to redress gender inequity from a shift with an exclusive focus on women to an approach that must involve men in the family and the broader socio-cultural environment through facilitating strategic, broad-based, and multifaceted solutions to gender inequality. The focus of GAD is also to strengthen women's legal rights.

WID tends to focus on practical needs, whereas GAD focuses on both practical needs and strategic interests. In addition to focusing on everyday problems, GAD is concerned with addressing the root inequalities (of both gender and class) that create many of the practical problems women experience in their daily lives. Practical needs refer to what women perceive as immediate necessities such as water, shelter and food. Strategic gender interests are long-term, usually not material, and are often related to structural changes in society regarding women's status and equity. They include legislation for equal rights, reproductive choice, and increased participation in decision-making. The strategic interests of women's development and empowerment tend to be a long-term project that include consciousness-raising, increasing self-confidence, providing education, strengthening women's organizations and fostering political mobilization.

There remains a whole range of women's problems from female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, sexual abuse, sex trade and trafficking, rising son preference and devaluing daughters, marital rape, unfair burden of population policy and AIDS campaign on women, problems of single women, branding rural women as witches in several parts of the country, to the legal rights of women regarding property, divorce and succession, that have yet to see concerted action by policy makers and planners. There is a strange silence on heinous crimes of fathers raping daughters especially in Kerala, where women's health, education and basic socio-economic indicators match those of the advanced countries in the world.⁴¹ Women's activism for gender equality is quite weak even where women enjoy situational advantage. Highly educated and financially independent women are seen succumbing to dowry demands, son-preference, domestic violence and sexual harassment at the work place.

⁴¹Institute of Applied Manpower Research, *India Human Development Report 2011*, New Delhi: Institute of Applied Manpower Research, 2011.

Studies on Violence Against Women (VAW) reveal that nearly one out of four men of 10,000 men in Asia agreed that they had committed rape and sexual entitlement or a belief that men were entitled to sex regardless of consent was the major reason that men gave for committing a rape.⁴² Crimes against women attract suspicion of women's character (case of love gone sour) and sexual assault and rape in the news media framed in relation to women's freedoms. Basic rights and safety remain out of reach for a vast majority of women in India. The discourse on women's resistance is focused on "get your own safety pin" or teaching self-defence rather educating boys and men to be humane. Women are under constant surveillance in private and public life. There is the tremendous power of collective punishing mechanism by shaming women and warning against behaviour perceived as undesirable by sections of society (khaps, caste councils). There are multiple agencies from family members to criminals regulating or negating women's degrees of freedom. Rarely understood is the trauma of women who become 'objects of social ostracism' (due to acid attack, rape, or other violence).

In 2014, the Indian Ordnance Factory, Kanpur launched a light revolver *Nirbheek* (meaning fearless) for women. This raises the question: if women's safety is all about owning a gun, what about the rapist who lurks at home?⁴³ There is an even strange justification that if a woman does not reciprocate a man's 'love' he can kill or maim her. Instead of strengthening the criminal justice system, improving law and order and policing skills, arranging safety measures like street lights, transport facilities for women and creating enabling work environments, the government advocates the use of pepper sprays (widely available in grocery shops) and business is focused on developing apps and various other products that can trigger alarms to emergency contacts if a woman is attacked.

⁴²Maria Cheng, "Study: Rape against women 'widespread' in Asia" 11 September 2013 <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/09/10/rape-asia-men sex/2792811/>> (27 May 2016).

⁴³Kalpna Sharma, "In the Line of Fire," *The Hindu*, 19 January 2014, 3.

The development of women is not to be perceived as by women, of women and for women; men as fathers, husbands, brothers, sons and friends must unite to strengthen the lives of girls and women and for achieving the vision of India as a developed country. Education and the mass media must play a critical role in widening the discourse on gender equality and challenging the social and political order that systematically devalues women.

6. Conclusion

The Government of India launched the National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001⁴⁴ with the following specific objectives:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil;
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc;
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process;
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and

⁴⁴Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development, *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001*, New Delhi: Government of India, 2001.

- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Most of these objectives have largely remained on paper with little action. Nearly after a decade, the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was announced on March 8, 2010 and operationalised during 2011-2012. It works with all the States and Union Territory governments and has 14 Ministries and Departments of Government of India as its partners with the Ministry of Women and Child Development as the Nodal Ministry. The Mission aims to bring in convergence and facilitate the processes of ensuring economic and social empowerment of women with emphasis on health and education, reduction in violence against women, generating awareness about various schemes and programmes meant for women, empowerment of vulnerable women and women in difficult circumstances.⁴⁵

The NMEW has undertaken initiatives to check the declining sex ratio in 12 districts of seven States to address the sex selective elimination of girls. It is collaborating with various community organisations to further the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme, address issues of domestic violence, partnering with Lawyers Collective Women's Rights Initiative (LCWRI) and attempting to bring diverse stakeholders in raising the collective community consciousness on women's issues. The Mission must engage in strategic communication for inter-ministerial convergence of gender mainstreaming of programmes, policies, institutional arrangements and processes of participating ministries which have largely hitherto operated independently and in a stand-alone manner. The NMEW is in the process of working on a fresh National Empowerment Policy for Women. It is too early to predict the substantial gains in women's empowerment through the NMEW.

There are several social campaigns involving men like the *Beti Padhao Beti Bachao* (Educate and Save the Girl Child), *Bell Bajao* (Ring the Bell for domestic violence), *What Kind Of Man Are You?* (AIDS awareness campaign), the *One Billion Rising* Campaign to

⁴⁵www.nmew.gov.in

highlight the worldwide violence against women and several community initiatives that attempt to resolve the problems faced by women. Positive role modelling through audio-visual communication must be used to break the initial resistance and enable the family and community to participate in empowering women towards health care and improving their status. Family life education and sex education must receive top priority in general education and the mass media. Programme modules on parenting must be popularized in schools and colleges to promote greater understanding among the youth about their roles and social responsibility as future parents and create a more responsible dialogue between partners to promote concepts of masculinity that include committed fatherhood. An intensive Behaviour Change Communication must be initiated by multi-sectoral agencies to address the masculine norms and behaviour that heighten the risk for both men and women and prevent mutually beneficial relationships and inclusive human development. All health information campaigns must stress the importance of inter-spouse communication to improve the lives of girls and women and encourage equitable sharing of household and care-giving responsibilities throughout the life cycle. The compassion of the Buddha and Jesus show that men are capable of sublime virtues with proper education, guidance and engagement in personal and social life. The future generation of boys must learn that gender equality will make the world kinder, less violent, and less demanding for men as well.⁴⁶ The message of gender equality given by Nancy Smith in her powerful poem must become the essence of human sensitization:

For every woman who is tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong, there is a man who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable.

For every woman who is tired of being called "an emotional female," there is a man who is denied the right to weep and to be gentle.

⁴⁶Harsh Mander, "Working with Masculinities," *The Hindu*, 22 February 2014 <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/Harsh_Mander/working-with-masculinities/article5716806.ece> (22.2. 2014).

For every woman who is tired of being a sex object, there is a man who must worry about his potency.

For every woman who is called unfeminine when she competes, there is a man for whom competition is the only way to prove his masculinity.

For every woman who takes a step toward her own liberation, there is a man who finds the way to freedom has been made a little easier.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Nancy R. Smith, "For Every Woman" 1973<<http://www.workplacespirituality.info/ForEveryWoman.html>> (22.02.2016).