“Kashmir to Kanyakumari India is one” is the established philosophy of Unity in diversity.

**Ancient Indian culture:** The primitive Indian culture eloquently illuminates about respect to women. The woman is considered as the epitome of Love, Affection, Sacrifice, Strength and Inspiration. According to Manusmriti, it says,

> "Yatra naaryastu puujyante ramante tatra devataah|
> Yatraitaastu na puujyante sarvaastatraaphalaah kriyaah||"

The above verse echoed the message that in a society where the women are respected with honour and their desire is accomplished, the grace of God is blessed to the family and the society as a whole. On the contrary, where the women are perpetrated with unfairness and repression, ill-treatment, then all the acts and deeds are shrouded with sins and all efforts become fruitless. The blessing of God is declined. Thus from the ancient Indian culture, women are given a place of high respect in the Society. They were enjoying equal status and rights with men. They were educated and allowed to be married on attaining the age of maturity and they were also at liberty to select their husband by Swaymber system.

The Close connection of woman has accorded the status of divine revelation in Hindu Dharma as per four Vedas, namely Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.

**Mythological Era:** A line of an important Shloka "yaa devi sarva bhooteshu shakti roopena sansthitaa" reminds us to believe Devi is Shakti. In other words, Goddess is the centre of power, wealth, knowledge and victory etc. We worship Devi Parvati, Mahalaxmi, Saraswati, Kali, Durga etc. Parvati for Shiva, Lakshmi for Vishnu, and Saraswati for Brahma are believed as strength and power of their male counterpart. The devoted wife Savitri was so powerful that she could be able to get back her husband after his death. The holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri etc. are respected at par with “mother” called “Ganga Maata” and so on. Earth is termed as Matrubhumi as it is embodied with tolerance. The Nature (Prakruti) is composed of three elements such as ‘Rajas’ (Creation), ‘Sattva’ (Preservation) and Tamas (Destruction). So, the nature is considered in feminine existence. Nature is also considered as mother being gift of God.

It is axiomatic that the feminine attributes of woman being the source of power and strength is seen to have been absorbed with the goddess, rivers, earth and nature etc. The corollary is that the womanhood is an indicator on the source of power in a living civil society. India is adorned
with symbolic icon of Bharat Mata which is respected by all Indians. It conveys the message to the nation as a whole to honour the women with purity. Thus empowerment of women is longstanding desire prevailing since Vedic period till date.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe**, a female author, novelist, social activist and philanthropist who is popularly known for her antislavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin has said "Women are the real architects of society."

**Guru Nanak**, the founder of Sikhism has said thus;

"Man takes birth from woman. Within woman does the creature’s body grow. To a woman does a man get engaged and married. Through her are established blood relations. The cycle of births in this world is sustained by women.------. A woman is born only from another woman (and never from a man). None in this Universe can take birth without a woman.------."

**Mahatma Gandhi** [To the Women of India (Young India, Oct. 4, 1930)] - has said as follows;

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"

Justice **Altamas Kabir**, the then Chief Justice of India said that "A nation which cannot ensure respect for its women can never prosper."

**Women in Indian Freedom Fight:** The contribution of many women freedom fighters is written in golden letters in the annals of Indian history of freedom fight. Some of them are Rani Lakshmibai, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Sucheta Kripalani, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Annie Besant, Madam Bhikaiji Cama, Kamala Nehru, Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta, Savitribai Phulte, Indira Gandhi, Padmaja Naidu, Veera Mangai Velunachiyan, Sister Nivedita, Mirra Alfassa known as The Mother, Meera Ben and Sarala Ben etc.

**Constitution of India:** Equality and equal treatment to all irrespective of caste, creed & religion is the profound objectives of fundamental rights enshrined in Constitution of India. The serenity of the grant is sacrosanct. Women are given equal rights, opportunities in the matter of employment at par with the men, adequate means of livelihood, equal pay for equal work, humane conditions of work and maternity relief, to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women, one third Reservation of seats for women in three tier Panchayatiraj systems and local urban body elections. Human Trafficking and child labour are also prohibited. In spite of the rights and safeguards flown from the Constitution, still large numbers of women are not aware of their rights and duties because of illiteracy.

**Political Empowerment:** In the Indian political scenario, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was elected in the year 1937 to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces and became first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post as Minister of local self-
government and public health. She was the woman President of the UN General Assembly and has also held the post of Governor of Maharashtra. Sarojini Naidu otherwise known as ‘Nightingale of India’ was the first woman to become the Governor of an Indian State. The Country is proud of being a woman Prime Minister Late Indira Gandhi, Woman President Mrs. Prativa Devisingh Patil, Woman Speaker of Lok Sabha namely Mrs. Meira Kumar and present Speaker Mrs. Sumitra Mahajan. That apart, India has witnessed sixteen Women Chief Ministers namely Sucheta Kripalini and Mayabati (Uttar Pradesh), Janaki Ramachandran and Jaya Lalita(Tamil Nadu), Sushma Swaraj and Shila Dixit(Delhi), Nandini Satapathy (Odisha), Shashikala Kakodkar (Goa), Syeda Anwara Taimur (Assam), Rajinder Kaur Bhittal (Punjab), Rabindra Devi (Bihar), Uma Bharati (Madhya Pradesh), Mamata Banarjee (West Bengal), Vasundhara Raje Scindia (Rajasthan), Anandiben Patel (Gujarat) and Mehebooba Mufti (Jammu & Kashmir).

That apart, many women have also occupied the post of Governor in the past. They are Prabha Rao, Prativa Patil, Margaret Alva, Kamla Beniwal, Sharda Mukherjee, Rama Devi, Justice Fatima Beevi(first woman judge of the Supreme Court), Sheila Dikshit, Rama Dulari Sinha, Jothi Venkatachalam, Sheila Kaul, Urmila Singh, Padma Naidu, Sarla Grewal(IAS officer), Kumud Ben Manishankar Joshi, Chandrawati, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Rajani Rai. Presently, Mridula Sinha-Goa, Draupadi Murmu-Jharkhand and Najma Heptulla-Manipur are also occupying the post of Governor.

Women Participation in Panchayatiraj and Urban Local Bodies: As per 73rd Amendment of Constitution of India in the year, 1992, the process of reservation of 33 per cent seats for women was opened in Three Tier Panchayatiraj System and Urban Local Bodies. In Odisha, large numbers of women have occupied the chair in Panchayati Raj institutions.

Shortfalls in Political Empowerment: Despite spectacular representation of women in the Indian political scenario from the pre-Independence era till date, there seems to be inadequate representation of women in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. It is apt to mention here that reservation of seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes commensurating their proportionate population ratio is provided in the Constitution of India but women from such caste are seldom selected as a candidate to contest in the election. Similarly, Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeking to reserve one-third of total seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies introduced during the regime of UPA Government could not be passed due to sheer political will on account of divergent views of many political parties despite
their laudable voice for enhancing the modalities for woman empowerment. Until the said Bill is reflected in to action thereby giving adequate representation of women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies, there cannot be true women empowerment in the political scenario of India in its letter and spirit.

As regards, representation of women in Three Tire Panchayatiraj System, illiteracy of elected women representative (may be she is a Sarapanch or a member of Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad) plays a major factor of disability. Their independence to work in free and fair manner to upkeep their commitment to the people is hijacked by their male counterpart who may be her husband, brother, father etc. on account of male chauvinism. Many educated and talented women being afraid of muscle power, money power and criminalisation in politics are afraid of their security as a result of which the basic idea of giving power to people through qualitative leadership is at stake.

Social Empowerment: Once upon a time, the profession which was considered as male dominated profession has now been shared by women. Many women have now accepted "the profession of their choice such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, Judges, scientists, bankers, pilots, transport drivers, song and music, dance, sports and games, entrepreneurs and in Civil Services. But their representation commensurating the women population ratio in the country is very negligible. The adverse effect of Poverty, gender inequalities, Illiteracy, inadequate medical facilities and lack of adequate safety measure are the major chunk of obstacle in the development of social empowerment of women. The organised women have raised their voice to shot down liquor shops, prevent Child marriage and create awareness on AIDS and HIVs. In many areas, women have organised their community group to protect forest growth to maintain ecological balances. In the wake of crawling effect of crime against women, the general awareness of women to accept training on self defence is rapidly increasing. From the above, it is conspicuously seen that women are kin to establish their sense of identity, leadership quality, autonomy and self confidence to meet any challenge in the society. Longstanding traditions prohibiting equal rights to worship for women and preventing them from entering into Temples/ Mosques have been stopped by intervention of the Supreme Court. Women are now allowed their access to the sanctum like men in Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, Shani Shignapur Temple and Haji Ali Dargaah in Maharashtra.

Economic Empowerment of Women: Majority of rural women suffers from illiteracy and unemployment. In order to promote economic empowerment of women, Government have introduced several programmes and schemes for poverty alleviation. The Central Sector Scheme called Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (STEP) aims to upgrade skill of women in the lower strata of life and provide employment to asset less women on sustainable basis. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), Sabla Scheme is implemented through State Government to enhance self-development and empowerment, nutrition and health status etc. of adolescent girls. Central and State Social Welfare Board (CSWB) are constituted to address the socio-economic needs of the women and children. National Rural Livelihood Mission is launched to enable women to access micro credit and micro finance facilities to secure self employment opportunities and strengthen their livelihood. The institution of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is a National Credit Fund for Women which
ameliorate the income generating activities at concessional terms by providing micro-credit facilities to poor women.

**Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)** is a newly created institution declared by the Finance Minister during presentation of Union Budget for the Financial Year-2016. It caters to meet the borrowing needs of non-corporate small business units of the country. It is comprised of three types of financial assistance provided under the following heads; Shishu Loan up to Rs.50,000, Kishore Loan ranging from Rs.50,000 to Rs.5 lakh and Tarun Loan above Rs.5 lakh and below Rs.10 lakh.

**Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB):** The pregnant and lactating women are constrained to incur wage loss. In order to compensate wage loss incurred by pregnant and lactating women, Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB) scheme promoted under Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) is introduced to provide cash incentives of Rs.4000/- under instalments subject to fulfilment of certain conditions. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) provides another one-time cash incentive to pregnant women and both the schemes are mutually coextensive. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) assures the guarantee of employment in a financial year for one hundred days to rural household who volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act prohibits gender inequalities by making provision for equal wages to men and women.

In spite of the vigorous steps to enrich economical growth of women there appears some inquisitive deficiencies in its implementation. For an example, MGNREGA prohibits use of tools and machineries to give guarantee of employment to unskilled manual labourer but it is seen in many places that unskilled manual work is substituted by sophisticated tools and machineries and payment of wages are shown artificially in records with the knowledge of implementing agencies. Many women job seekers finding no employment at their doorstep become the prey on the hands of Inter-State labour brokers on the false promise of lucrative payment of wages in order to assimilate their hunger. They are forced to work as domestic servant or trafficked for immoral purposes. Thus the economic independence of women is shattered to certain extent.

National Commission for Women is a statutory body which has been functioning since 1992. That apart, State Commission for women are also constituted to take care of the women. The basic objective of the Commission is to assure the women to exercise their constitutional and legal safeguards afforded to them. The Commission recommends remedial legislative measures to Government for the upliftment of women. It has the power to advise the Government in matter of policy affecting women. Though the Commission is the creature of National Commission for Women Act, 1990, it lacks its autonomy. Sometimes, it is criticised that the composition of the Commission in the matter of appointment of members are backed by political consideration by party in power. The Commission has no independent power to investigate any crime against women and punish the culprit. While the woman feels the Commission is ineffective to afford desired relief, the man in her counterpart equally feels unsecured to get justice from the alleged shelter of falsehood of woman. In order to afford complete relief to the parties, the Commission for Women needs more power. **Women and Civil Law: Women's right are recognised as human rights.**
Hindu Succession, 1956- By Hindu Succession (Amendment Act), 2005, daughters in a joint Hindu family, governed by Mitakshara law, daughter is granted the statutory right in her father’s unpartible property equally with men on and from 09.09.2005 when the amendment came into force. The Hon’ble Supreme Court in the case of Prakash & Ors. vs. Phulavati & Ors decided on 16.10.2015 has held that amendment is prospective in nature and the benefit is available to the daughter if both the father and the daughter were alive on 09.09.2005.

Hindu Marriage Act, 1956- It has prohibited monogamous marriage and fixed the marriageable age of bridegroom as 21 years and the bride as 18 years. Dissolution of marriage by divorce is restricted to fulfilment of certain grounds.

Muslim Personal Law: In contradistinction to Hindu Marriage Act, Muslim Personal Law allowing polygamous marriage, dissolution of marriage by three utterances of Talaq, payment of meagre maintenance to divorced Muslim women is now under hot discussion being grossly injurious to the human rights of the married Muslim women. The Supreme Court of India in Khursheed Ahmad Khan vs. State of U.P. & Ors.-2015(I) CLR-(SC) 659 decided on 09.02.2015 has confirmed the penalty of removal of Khursheed Ahmad Khan on the ground of entering second marriage during existence of the first marriage without permission of the Government as required under Conduct Rules. It is further held that "Polygamy was not an integral or fundamental part of the Muslim religion and monogamy was a reform within the power of the State under Article 25." As regards, Talaq conveyed three times by words, letters, telephone, short message through mobile or posting in social platform and even by Skype for dissolution of marriage has received serious criticism. In various Muslim countries like Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Morocco, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia and the neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh etc., developing a reformatory approach have banned Triple talaq, or instant divorce. Justice Hidayatullah has said that “If the lead is coming from Muslim countries, it is hoped that in the course of time the same measures will be applied in India also.”

Desirability of Uniform Code of Marriage: Constitutional Bench judgement in the case of Mohd. Ahmed Khan vs. Shah Bano Begum and Ors. [AIR 1985 SC-945] has observed as follows;

“A common Civil Code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies. No community is likely to bell the cat by making gratuitous concessions on this issue.-------. We understand the difficulties involved in bringing persons of different faiths and “persuasions on a common platform but, a beginning has to be made if the Constitution is to have any meaning.”

In Sarla Mudgal, President, Kalyani v. Union of India [AIR 1995 SC 1531], the Apex Court has observed as follows;

“The desirability of uniform code can hardly be doubted. But it can concretize only when social climate is properly built up by elite of the society, statesmen amongst leaders who instead of gaining personal mileage rise above and awaken the masses to accept the change. Therefore, a unified code is imperative both for protection of the oppressed and promotion of national unity and solidarity. But the first step should be to rationalize the Personal Law of the minorities to develop religious and cultural amity”
Recently, the Kerala High Court in the case of Nazeer @ Oyor Nazeer vs. Shemeema decided on 16.12.2016 in WP(C).No.37436 of 2003 (F) has held thus; “Justice has become elusive for Muslim women in India not because of the religion they profess, but on account of lack of legal formalism resulting in immunity from law. Law required to be aligned with justice. The search for solution to this predicament lies in the hands of the law makers.” In order to maintain the dignity of Muslim women and prevent them from discrimination on account of gender inequalities, the time has ripened for law makers to legislate Common Civil Code for the citizen of India irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 - Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 was a social reform movement in India. The old law did not meet the growing tendencies of the parties to such child marriage. The far reaching consequence of child marriage not only increases infant mortality but it has the effect on health risk and the child becomes the prey of domestic violence and sexual exploitation etc. In order to ensure eradication of child marriage, the old Statute Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 is replaced by Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. According to the new legislation, marriage between bridegroom below 21 years of age and the bride below 18 years of age is prohibited. Child marriage in contravention of law is made punishable.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 - This is an Act which provides protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace and for the prevention and redressal of complaints of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is also defined in the Act which covers physical contact, request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography or any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Safety measures for working women: In the changed Indian scenario of economic empowerment of women, many educated girls have accepted jobs in Government, “National/multinational I.T. Companies, Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs), Call Centres, Corporate and Media houses, Industries and factories, Business Establishments and Malls etc. They usually return home in late night or used to work in night shift. The barbaric Nirvaya crime in Delhi has kicked to the backbone of safety in the Country. Anti-social elements pinpoint their sacrilegious target on women travelling in night and as such women are vulnerable to crime by the criminals. Delhi Police and Karnataka State have taken policy measures to drop women employees at homes after 8 PM. The Delhi Police has directed to all employers to maintain database of all the employees, security personnel, cab drivers and contractual workers working with the women employee. Antecedents of cab driver, security guard should be scrupulously verified. Women employees are not made to travel alone with the cab driver. The driver should not be allowed to choose the route of the women employee as first pickup or last drop. The drivers of night hours cab shall wait at the doorstep on drop of the women till she informs over phone by call or SMS about her safe arrival/reaching at her place of residence. The Karnataka Government has issued guidelines by amending their Shops and Commercial Establishment Act where in adequate security measures are enumerated for the safety of working women. The cabs shall be conditioned to GPS facilities. This is high time for our State to legislate law for safety of working women.
Equal Remuneration Act (1976)- It postulates for payment of equal remuneration to both men and women workers for same work or work of a similar nature.

Women and Criminal Law: The crime against women is rapidly increasing in spite of stringent penal law existing in our Country. Violence against woman may be in form of rape, molestation, outraging the modesty, sexual harassment in workplace, sexual abuse of child, cruelty/torture, dowry demand, dowry death which are alarmingly increasing day by day. Eve teasing by road Romeos, obscene and indecent behaviour by gesture or phone calls or SMS, Acid Attack are stirring their life everyday. The sense of insecurity is predominantly playing in the mind of the woman and their right to move freely in a civilized society is at peril. Return home after the day’s work stands as a question of horror. Inside the home the woman is also not free from domestic violence. At present, no place is safe for them including the mother’s womb because of incidence of innumerable female foeticide. Female babies are killed before they see the light of the day and their corpse delicts are thrown on the streets and dumping yards where wild animal gets pleasure for their appetite. In the back drop of social malady and in order to curb the menace, stringent laws are enacted by the Parliament. Some of them are illustrated as follows;

Indian Penal Code, 1860- It contains provision for Dowry death, (Section-304-B), Abetment of suicide, Acid attack, outraging the modesty of woman, Sexual harassment, Voyeurism, Causing miscarriage, Importation/transportation of girls for sexualexploitation, Kidnapping & abduction of women, rape, Cruelty by husband or his relatives etc.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961- Demand for dowry by means any property or valuable security, giving and taking of dowry at or before or any time after the marriage is considered as a social evil and made punitive in law.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005- An Act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected or incidental to Domestic Violence. The Act provides Residence orders, Custody orders, Compensation orders and monetary reliefs etc. to the women suffering from domestic violence.

Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956(ITP Act)- Article 23 of the Constitution prohibits trafficking in human being and forced labour etc. Sexual exploitation or abuse of women/girl for commercial purposes is not only prohibited but made penal under the ITP Act,1956.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986- The Act prohibits indecent representation of women by way of advertisements, publication or sending by post of books, pamphlets, etc. For contravention of the provisions, imprisonment may extend to two years and with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees.

Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994- The Act prohibits sex selection before or after conception and prevents the misuse of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for sex determination leading to female feticide.

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