INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, General Assembly Resolution, December 1993 defines Violence as “Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women….”. Similarly The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women defines Violence against women as “Any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women including threats of such act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Violence against women is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives irrespective of religion, community, culture, class economic or educational status. Even at the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex-selective abortion or female infanticide in cultures where son preference is prevalent. During childhood, violence against girls may include enforced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and education, incest rape, female genital mutilation, early marriage, and forced prostitution or bonded labor. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives – battered, raped and even murdered at the hands of intimate partners or otherwise. Women irrespective of their class, caste or educational status are not safe and are victims of exploitation and violence. Perhaps the most crucial consequence of violence against women and girls is the denial of fundamental human rights to women and girls. International
human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, affirm the principles of fundamental rights and freedoms of every human being. Both CEDAW and the CRC are guided by a broad concept of human rights that stretches beyond civil and political rights to the core issues of economic survival, health, and education that affect the quality of daily life for most women and children. The above mentioned two Conventions call for the right to protection from gender-based abuse and neglect. The strength of these treaties rests on an international consensus, and the assumption that all practices that harm women and girls, no matter how deeply they are embedded in culture, must be eradicated. Violence against women and girls continues to be a global epidemic that troubles, kills, tortures, and also maims – physically, psychologically, sexually, emotionally and economically. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violations, denying women and girls equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women’s human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets. Moreover, when the violation takes place within the home, as is very often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and the law-enforcing machinery. The link between violence and lack of economic resources and dependence is circular. On the one hand, the threat and fear of violence keeps women from seeking employment, or, at best, compels them to
accept low-paid, home-based exploitative labor. And on the other, without economic independence,
women have no power to escape from an abusive relationship. The Government of India classifies crime against women into two major categories (National Crimes Records Bureau, 1994):

(1) **Crimes Identified Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC):**
1. Rape (Sec. 376 IPC);
2. Kidnapping and Abduction (Sec. 363-373 IPC);
3. Homicide for Dowry (Sec. 3021304-B IPC);
4. Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC);
5. Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC);
6. Sexual Harassment (Sec, 509 IPC);
7. Importation of girls (Sec. 366-B IPC);

(2) **Crimes Identified under the Special Laws (SL):**
1. Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987;
2. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961;
3. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956;
4. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

In India, almost 94% of total women workers are engaged in informal sector, of which about 20% work in the urban centers. Majority of women workers in informal sector come from those sections of the society which need income at any cost. Nearly 50 per cent of these women workers are sole supporters of their families. Most of the women workers lack proper training. They have very few options to avail as far as gainful jobs are concerned. The quiet contributors to the effortless movement of the social carriage, the women workers engaged in informal sector are poor, perhaps
poorest amongst poor, uneducated and weak. Due to poverty, illiteracy, social backwardness and being economically weak women are forced to work in the unorganized sector. They do not get protection in terms of job security, wages, working conditions and welfare. These include casual and seasonal employed women who have scattered places of work, lack of a concrete employer-employee relationship, irregular working hours, sexual harassment from their superiors and lack of legal protection or government support. India has a plethora of labor laws but laws which specifically relate to women are very few viz: The Maternity Benefit Act, The Equal Remuneration for Equal Work Act, and the Protection from Sexual Harassment Act and in general Penal and criminal laws. The real challenge for the Government would be to ensure that the labor laws and other penal laws on paper should be effectively implemented along with effective implementation of deterrent domestic violence laws so as to check these occurrences in future. Gender based violence including rape molestation eve teasing sexual harassment at workplace economic exploitation should be urgently looked into along with social security laws and policies for women should be formulated. And most importantly the issue of Spousal Violence should be dealt with strictly and urgently considering the fact that the very own on whom we bank for as our backbone and support system should be supportive and not the one who in turn after all the hard work inflicts pain and suffering as a normal part of life. Only Awareness, Education Effective and Deterrent Laws and help of NGO’s can change the living condition of working women especially in the unorganized sectors.