

Women Empowerment and Panchayath Raj System In India

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ABSTRACT

The Women Empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of the 21 century. Empowerment can enable women to participate as equal citizen, in the economic, politics, and social and sustainable development in the country. This agenda has been on top of the list of most government plans and programs. Effort have been made on a regular basis across nation to address this issue and enhance the social, economic and political status of women. However, it has been observed that most policies and programs view empowerment in the economic sense only, working in the belief that economic self-reliance empowers women, but ignoring other variables like health, education and literacy. This paper attempts to understand the concept of women empowerment on a holistic basis and critically examines initiated to words empowering women with special emphasis upon the schemes, programs, components, strategies of women empowerment and decentralization for women in India.

"To awake the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves"

- Pandithjawaharlal Nehru

1. Women empowerment

Women need a safe and enabling environment which encourages their empowerment. They should be able to live without fear so that they can explore their potential and not be bound by artificial restraints. Along with this, we need to push for affirmative policies which bring women on a level playing field with other. Provided with the right opportunities, the potential of Indian women knows no bounds.

The fact that we are speaking of "Women's Empowerment" shows that all is still not well with women, despite having broken through the glass ceiling in many fields. Women constitute about 35% of the workforce in software industry and enjoy the same status, wages and perk as man .They have also made great progress in various fields equaling and even surpassing men as doctor, teachers, engineers, law enforcers and soldiers. However, it has to be kept in mind that many of these women who have made great strides, did it braving very adverse situation, shrugging of social criticism and at time have even risked getting ostracized.

But is the picture same in the rural area Well, not so. A large number of women in rural area have remained untouched by empowerment. After more than six decades of independence women in rural area continue to play second fiddle to men are handicapped socially and economically cutting across the lines of caste, creed and economic stats, and bonds of custom and tradition help keep them under the male yoke.

Ancient Indian scriptures show that women enjoyed a respectable position during that time and many ancient text also talk about women scholars and sage. But gradually the patriarchy tightened its grip over the society and women were subjugated by men and this subjugation continues even

today.It is precisely this subordinate that necessitates women's empowerment so that a change can be brought about in their social-economic condition.

In rural India there is more need for empowerment. The factors which determine women's empowerment are Education, Poverty, Health, and Safety. Education here just does not mean merely teaching the three R's-reading, writing & arithmetic,but to make them aware of their right and also realize the discriminatory treatment given to them. Economic Independence is a vital aspect of empowerment. For this linking self Help Group Movement with Micro-credit facility will help reduce poverty and empower them. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is another means to provide job opportunities to women.

Health and nutritional need of a woman are not just dependent on availability and access to these service, but are closely linked to her status in the society, which constantly deprives her from getting these needs appropriately addressed. Poverty and economic dependence, gender bias and discrimination and a number of other reasons have an adverse impact on the health of women. The importance of bringing improvement in women's health and nutritional status has been realized and recognized by the Government and several interventions were introduced, yet major development challenges still remain to be addressed.

The decline in the child sex Ratio(CSR) defined as number of girls per1000 boys between 0-6 yrs of age, from 947 in to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011 is alarming. Realizing the gravity of the situation the Government announced ' BetiBachooBetiPadhoo' initiative which has the objectives of prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination; Ensuring survival and protection of girl child.

The idea of Women Empowerment came forward when the Third International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985 introduced and defined 'women empowerment is a re-distribution of social power and control of resource in favor of Women'. The government of India declared 2001. the year of Women's Empowerment and the National policy for the

empowerment of Women came into forces the same year. According to Sen and Batliwala empowerment leads to a growing inherent capabilities, greater self confidence. And an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enable one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasize on tow important aspects.

Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Women empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a satisfying human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities-health, mobility, education, and awareness, and also at the level of material security. and internal qualities -self awareness and self confidence.

The National Policy for empowerment of Women,2001 in India had the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy is widely disseminated in order to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goal. Specifically, the objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women include;

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
2. The *de-jure* and *de- facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women and men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil
3. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
4. 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
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
6. Changing societal attitude and community practice by active participant and involvement of both men and women
7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Similarly, the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India on international women's day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round Development of women. The mission had the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programme across ministries and departments. In light with its mandate, the mission has been named Mission Poorna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. As expressed in the statement of the mission which is "To strengthen the processes which promote holistic development and empowerment of women, gender equality and gender justice through inter-

sectoral convergence of programme that impact women, forge synergy among various stakeholders and create an enabling environment conducive to social change", the mission aims to provide a single window service for all programme run by the Government for Women under aegis of various Central ministries.

The key strategies adopted by the National Mission for Empowerment of Women,2010 are;

- Inter-sectoral convergence of sachems for women monitoring and review of progress
- Strengthening institutional framework for greater efficiency in support to women
- Focused research, review of schemes, programmes and legislation, and gender audits for evidence based policy making
- Investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, micro-credit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women
- Support to panchayatraj institution; women's movement and community representatives for strengthening of local bodies
- 360 degree approach on media and communication for behaviour change and social mobilization for gender equality

Following at the major domain areas of the National Mission for Empowerment of women;

- Poverty Alleviation and Economic Empowerment of Women
- Social Empowerment And Education
- Health and Nutrition
- Gender Right, Gender Based Violence and Law Enforcement
- Gender Budgeting, Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Audit
- Empowerment of vulnerable and Marginalized Group and Women in Difficult Circumstance
- The focus area of the mission are;
- violence against women
- Declining child sex ratio
- Prevention if child marriage
- Health and sanitation
- Trafficking
- Drinking water
- Gender budgeting
- Right to education
- Elected women representation
- I.E.C activities
- Drudgery reproduction
- Innovative financial inclusion
- Engendering livelihood program mes/training programme

Apart from these there are a large number of important schemes run by government of India that have impacted lives of women and have contributed to their empowerment. same of these schemes are;

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme(MGNREGS)
- Public distribution system(PDS)
- Integrated child development services scheme(ICDSS)

- National rural health mission(NRHM)
- National rural livelihood mission(NRLM)
- Sarvashikshnaabhiyaan(SSA)
- National literacy mission(NLM)
- Rajiv gandhi scheme for empowerment of adolescent girls(SABLA)
- Rashtriyaswasthyabimayojana(RSBY)
- The indiragandhimatritvasahyogojna
- Total sanitation campaign
- Indira gandhi national widow pension scheme
- Indragandhi national old pension scheme
- Support for training and empowerment programme for women(STEP)
- SWADHAR
- Janani surakshayojana
- Panchayat mahilaevamyuvashaktiabhiyan
- Scheme for leadership development for minority women
- Science and technology for women
- Adivasi mahilasashaktikaranyojana of (NSTFDC)

These initiatives have resulted in recognizing and reinforcing the significance of issue of gender equality and empowerment of women for sustainable development in social and economic spheres. But still there exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms and the reality of the status of women in India.

2. Status of Women Empowerment

Behaviour and talent are two of the core drivers of

Sustainable, long-term economic growth. If half of these talent are underdevelopment or underutilized, the economy will never grow as it could. Multiple studies have shown that healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children, creating a positive, virtuous cycle for the border population. Research also shows the benefits of gender equality in politics: when women are more involved in decision-making, they make different decision-not necessarily better or worse-but decisions that reflect the needs of more members of society. Keeping aside the political Empowerment, in other three indices, India's rank is 114, which is a good indicator of its position in global scenario. The political Empowerment ranks quite high, may be due to the 73rd and 74th Indian Constitutional Amendments providing greater opportunity to women to take active part in politics. But overall, the situation needs improvement.

Economic participation and opportunity-123 rank

Educational Attainment-121 rank

Health and Survival-134 rank

Political Empowerment-17

Overall Index-105 rank

(source: World Economic Forum- 2014)

3. Panchayat Raj and women development

Decision making processes in panchayats need to be better defined, to diminish the possibility of elite capture, proxy participation and single point decision. It is argued that women need to be political empowered in the realm of political decision making so as to facilitate their real empowerment. About one million women entered panchayats after 73 constitutional

amendment Act. It is 40% of the elected women represented the marginalized section and about 70% women representative were illiterate and most of them had no previous political experience. There fore it was but natural that there was a widespread apprehension that women will be manipulated by men. However, in spite of several instance of such manipulation and capitulation by woman the presence of such a large number of women in panchyats has ended had a deep impact on gender equality. The occupation posts in grassroots democratic government is a huge social and political revolution, the significance of which would take at lead a generation to fully unfold.

The constitution prescribes only a minimum level of reservation of one third for women in panchyats but the states have leeway to mandate more than that level. Bihar took the bold step of reserving 50% of the panchayat seats for women. And at local level, the 73 constitutional amendment act 1992 has made two important provision for the involvement of women in decision making and preparation of plan for development. This amendment has made a provision that at least one third of women would be members and chair persons of the panchyats at three level means at Gram panchyats level, taluka level. And Zilla panchayat level. These women also include from scheduled cast and scheduled tribe communities. secondly, panchayat s are also expected to prepare plans for economic development including the 29 subjects listed in the eleventh scheduled of the constitution. The rural plan prepared by zillaparishad s would be forwarded to district planning committee for preparing a consolidate plan for the rural and urban areas of the district.

Now, this was the mandate given by the constitution for development of entire rural areas including women. Women would only be empowered if various developmental works which are undertaken are benefiting women. By now two and half decades have been elapsed when the 73 amendment act was put into practice. But evaluation of the functioning of the panchayats revealed that not much progress has been made in the effective functioning of the panchayats with some aberrations like kerala. Now issue is; how well women's development plans would be formulated under panchayati Raj institutions in the country so that the issue not only declining CSR is arrested but overall women development take place in the country side. This paper deals with this question.

The most important reason decentralized planning has not benefited women as nothing specific was mentioned about women through they have different set of problems and would require different prescriptions. At present, decentralized plan is not uniform in all the states. The state plan has two sector one is district sector and the other state sector. The schemes which could be prepared and planned at the district level and transferred to district sector. In some states a fund, called united fund is also developed from states to districts on the basis of formula. This fund is kept at the disposal of the district to use in the manner it likes. Most of the rural development programmes in states are implemented through district rural development agencies(DRDA).

4. Decentralized planning for the Development of women

The real situation is that the decentralized planning which is also expected to incorporate the provisions for the development of women has not been prepared and

implemented. It resulted into non-optimization of scarce resource in terms of people, money and material. The methodology of women's development in a decentralized approach is based on the concept of integrated area planning. It implies evolving a development scenario at the people, growth potential, with a viable financial resource.

The objective of decentralized plan of women's development plan would be to raise income level, to reduce poverty, to reduce social and political disabilities and finally to improve the quality of life. Three important aspects of women's development plan may be mentioned before outlining its component at local level.

First, integration of various women's development programmes being implemented by different departments at different level.

Secondly, these programmes should be linked with the other development programmes at various level.

Hardly village development plans, block development plans, zillaparishad plans and finally district development plans should be formulated keeping in view the needs of different areas.

5. Components of the Women's Development plan

1. Economic component:

(a) Employment generation, (b) poverty elimination, (c) developing organization and managerial skills, (d) entrepreneurship development.

2. Infrastructural development and its access:

(a) Marketing facilities, (b) provision of necessary inputs, (c) credit facilities, (e) schooling facilities, (f) training facilities, (g) other supportive services such as extension etc.

3. Social component

Education (b) housing (c) provision of drinking water, (d) toilet facilities (e) provision of fuel, (f) provision of fodder, (g) smokeless chulhas, (h) bio-gas plants (i) welfare of aged and destitute, (j) awakening about social custom such as marriage, funeral etc.

4. Cultural component

(a) Sports, music, dance, drama etc

Literature.

5. Medical component

(a) Child care and maternity facilities, (b) family welfare, (c) population control

6. Environment component

(a) Sanitation, (b) social forestry, (c) farm forestry

7. (a) Political literacy, (B) general awareness, (c) dissemination of the success stories of women's contribution elsewhere (d) building leadership qualities among women

8. Structural component

(a) Monitoring the flow of economic benefits, (b) monitoring of flow of social benefits, (c) monitoring the flow of infrastructural beneficiaries, (d) monitoring the flow of other benefits.

Encompassing the above components, annual, five years and perspective plans may be prepared.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, after more than six decades of planning in India women are far below their male counterparts because they have not been involved as participants and decision-makers in development. The 73rd constitution amendment act enables women to take decision in the area of their concern as well as total development of rural area. A number of working groups on decentralized planning/block planning have submitted their report. They have evolved a methodology for decentralized approach. So far only sectoral plans for women development implemented by different departments have been in vogue. Under the new Panchayat Raj system the plans are expected to be prepared and implemented by Panchayat themselves. For meaningful exercise of women's development plan a sound data base, more resourced and assertiveness on the part of women are important. Involvement of NGO's and professionals are also important components for strengthening the processes of women's empowerment under the Panchayat Raj System.

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