

Women Empowerment Initiatives in India

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ABSTRACT

Women Empowerment has become an important issue of discussion in the development of nations. Empowering women is an effort to make them independent in various aspects of life above all social and family restrictions. The Government of India has taken various initiatives/schemes to resolve different to resolve different problems of women in a traditional male dominated society. Women are needed to be aware of Constitutional/legal provisions to make empowerment effective. Women empowerment is the way to uplift the social, economic and political status of women especially in underprivileged sections. It is the process of expanding women's ability to have control on resources and to improve quality of life. This paper highlights the various initiatives/steps taken by government of India to empower them to have access to education, employment and other opportunities.

1. Introduction

Women in India constitute a significant segment of society and of Indian culture since Vedas Puranas, but still face gender disabilities and discrimination everywhere. Even in 21st century, women are not enjoying basic rights and independent identity. Domestic violence, female foeticide, demand for dowry, poor access to health, education and employment, mobility restrictions, male domination, patriarchy, gender inequality, women security and decision making power, class and caste divisions, social discrimination, illiteracy, inheritance and ownership rights, inaccess to credit, dependence on men for protection and other things, unsafe working environment, lack of support services for transportation, and for other occupations/ vocations, Micro and macro nutrient deficiencies, social stereotyping, marginalized women and numerous other problems being faced by Indian women. No doubt, efforts made by Central government, State Government and Society have created mass awareness to uplift economic, political and social status of women especially in rural areas and for underprivileged class. Government of India has taken various initiatives to create an environment for women free from exploitation, discrimination, persecution, oppression and other barriers. Respecting or honoring women is not enough for the development of the country rather it needs change in the mindsets of the people, improving quality of life for women, removing social taboos and giving power and freedom to women to participate fully in every sector of the economy. Any nation's growth depends largely upon the equal participation of both genders in social, educational, political, economic and spiritual context. Empowerment aims at changing power relations in favor of those who are at lower levels of a hierarchy. Empowerment of women enables them to develop self-reliance control resources, self-realization, and

awareness about various challenges of women, capacity building and much more in traditionally male dominated structure. In India, women in rural areas have lagged behind in various aspects as compared to urban areas such as confinement to four walls of the household, lack of mobility, access to education, development of skills, low social status, no participation in decision making, over-burdened with domestic work, violence, disproportionate sex ratio etc. In rural areas, the women empowerment issue is of great relevance, as women need equal powers to stand side by side to the men. There is a need to promote education opportunities, making women more powerful and respectful, protection from physical and mental abuse and creating basic facilities to empower women. Empowering women can be the solution to various problems and benefits not only an individual woman but to various women groups, communities and families. The Constitution of India provides equal fundamental rights to all citizens and no discrimination on the basis of gender. Special steps/laws have been enacted to ensure the protection and development of women. Special attention has also been given to empower women during Five Year Plans. Institutional and legislative support aiming at social and economic empowerment of women helps them to realize their rights and develop full potential.

2. Review of literature

Subrahmanyam (2011) has highlighted the progress of women education in India at present from past and discussed the overall enrolment of girl students in school. Empowerment is the process of acquiring various activities of women and giving power/authority to act.

Bhavani Rao (2011) has discussed the various Government provisions for resolving health issues among women and children.

Beena and Amrita (2012) have analyzed the concept of women empowerment incorporating divergent view such as problems faced and opportunities for empowerment by educating women in a male dominated society.

Agnihotri and Malipatil (2017) have pointed out that women empowerment is the topic of discussion in development of economies in political, social, economic context. Women empowerment is needed to make women more powerful in decision making, uplifting the social status of families and to aware them regarding their basic rights.

3. Objectives of the study:

- To know the need of empowering women.
- To study various initiatives/Schemes for women empowerment in India.

This paper is purely based on secondary data/Sources and descriptive in nature.

4. Need for Women Empowerment:

To recognize self-worth, confidence, personal and professional freedom, true potential, rights to equality, freedom of voice, social life participation, right to education, health, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation and many more issues- there is a need to create mass awareness regarding educating society with women's challenges. Women Empowerment enables the women- to realize their equal competence to men in various socio-economic-political structures, access to higher education, benefitting the employment and job spheres, reduction in domestic violence, exposure to public/professional life, upliftment of social and economic status, assurance of safety, decision making power, changing social and community attitudes, strengthening partnerships with civil society especially women's organizations and guarantee various measures for women to have access to various developmental processes. Comprising half the population of the country, except few high achievers, the status of women in India is still underrepresented in various spheres of life.

In 2016, As per UN Human Development Report, Gender Inequality Index, India Ranks at 125th position out of 159 countries and in 2017, as per World Economic forum, Gender Gap Index-India ranks at 108th out of 144 countries. In 2017, approximately 5 percent of women between the age group of 14 to 49 years were suffering from anemia. The level of education of women is lower than that of men –only 35.3 percent in the secondary level education. Women participation in the work force is also around 26 percent. In Parliament, in Panchayats or in other political arena, the number of women is not encouraging. In terms of females to male ratio, India stands at 191st position.

There is a need to generate a social wave of change and sustainable solutions to start a new regime of women empowerment for their well being, Right policy support, Skill India, Digital India, Make in India, Conducive Business environment and other joint initiatives taken by both

Government and Society can prove the torch because of the much needed change and a speedy women empowerment. Only women's active participation through education in social, political and economic life can bring hopes to the successful beginning of the women empowerment. The Government of India has taken various initiatives for women in India. Some of these initiatives are as:

1. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao:** The Ministry of Human Resource Development, the Ministry of Health and Family welfare and the Ministry of women and child Development has launched 'Save the Girl Child' movement in 2015, with an initial funding of Rs 100 crores targeting in Bihar, Punjab, Delhi Haryana and Uttarakhand. In some states of the country, female foeticide has resulted in sharp decline in the ratio of girls as compared to boys. In 2011, the child gender ratio in the age group of 0-6 years was 918 girls for every 1000 boys. The Government of India has initiated to promote eradication of female foeticide, to educate girl child and to create awareness on welfare services for young girls in the country.

2. **One Stop Centre Scheme (Sakhi):** This scheme was initiated in 2015 with the 'Nirbhaya' fund for providing shelter, medical, legal, police help and counseling services to victims of violence under one roof with 24-hour helpline. There are various one stop centers at various locations and can be contacted for services. Some of these centers are:

- Medical Assistance
- Legal aid and Counseling
- Assistance in lodging FIR/NCR/DIR
- Shelter (Swadhar Greh, Short stay homes)
- Video Conferencing facility for police and Courts
- Psycho Social Counseling
- Emergency Response/Rescue Services

One stop Centre scheme will support all women including girls below 18 years irrespective of caste, religion, class, marital status or any place.

3. **Working Women Hostels:** The Government of India has launched this scheme to make available hostel facility to any women, whose income does not exceed Rs 50,000 per month in metropolitan cities and Rs 35000 per month in any other place. This scheme ensures availability of safe, convenient accommodation for working family, daycare facilities for children and rent charges not exceeding 15 percent of their total gross salary in case of single bedrooms, 10 percent in case of double bedrooms and 7.5 percent in the case of dormitories, daycare charges not exceeding 5% of their mother's salary or the actual expenditure whichever is less.

4. **Swadhar Greh:** In 2002, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched this scheme for rehabilitation of women and to provide them food, clothing, shelter and care to the marginalized women. Women survivors

of natural disasters, women victims of violence and terrorism, women deserted by their families/relatives and who are in need can avail/ benefits of this scheme. Women above 18 years of age can take benefits and are entitled to take legal assistance, guidance for readjustment in the family, empower themselves for a new life with dignity and conviction. Vocational and skill upgradation training for economic rehabilitation of women is also provided.

5. STEP: The support to Training and Employment Programme for women (STEP) Scheme aims at making women self-employed/entrepreneurs by providing skills and competencies to poor and marginalized section of the society. The Sectors include Handlooms, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidery, Horticulture, Agriculture, Food Processing, Zari, IT and Computer based services, skills such as Gems and Jewellery, Travel and tourism, English (Spoken), hospitality - for assistance to foster economic growth and social development. This scheme aims at providing-training for upgradation of skills and employment on a sustainable basis through various action oriented projects. Women in the age-group of 16 years and above can avail the benefits and support services (child care, nutrition education, health, credit access, sanitation etc.)

6. Nari Shakti Puruskars: These are national level awards to recognize the service and efforts made by women and institutions for the cause of marginalized and vulnerable women.

7. Mahila E-haat: The Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched a direct online marketing service as part of the 'Digital India' initiative to support Self-Help Groups, women entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This Platform helps the women to leverage technology by registering themselves at www.mahilaehaat.-rmk.gov.in for introducing their skills and works to markets. This scheme facilitates training, workshops, web-based approach, mobile accessibility, buyers and sellers direct contact, easy sign-in and payment mode access and many more services.

8. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for Children Health Check-up, Food and Nutrition: The Government of India, keeping in view of rising employment opportunities for women and making women financial independent, has focused on substitute care for young children

and children between the age groups of 6 months to 6 years while their mothers are working. The Scheme aims at providing-day care facilities for children (6 months to 6 years), physical, social, cognitive and emotional development of children, education to caretakers/parents for better childcare, improvement of nutrition, drinking water, sanitary, food, medical and health check up facilities.

9. Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) for the pregnant and lactating women: The Government of India, Minister of Women and Child Development has launched maternity benefits scheme for the pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age/above for first two births along with cash incentive of Rs 4000 in three installments. This scheme encourages women to follow nutrition and young child feeding practices and promotes appropriate care and institutional service utilization practices.

10. Mahila Shakti Kendras: In 2017, the government of India has launched this scheme to empower rural women through training and capacity building to avail opportunities like skill development, health and nutrition facilities, employment and digital literacy. This Scheme works at National, State, District and Block levels.

11. Sukanya Samridhi Yojana: This scheme is a government backed saving scheme for girl children and account can be opened at any post office or a branch of an authorized commercial bank. This scheme is provided till the age of 10 from the date of birth of the girl child and only one account is allowed pre child and the girl child after attaining the age of 10 years can have access of 50 percent withdrawal for higher education at the age of 18.

5. Conclusion:

Government of India with the help of different departments and ministries have initiated various development programmes for empowering women and bringing equality for both males and females in various areas. Women empowerment is an essential tool for improving quality of work life, raising of economic status, fulfillment of development goal and eliminating ill practices against women. Schemes for women empowerment definitely will help in changing the attitude of people towards women and making them independent in different aspects over social and family restrictions.

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