



An analysis of government initiatives for women empowerment in India

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Abstract

The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. Various efforts have been made by government to address this issue and enhance the socio economic status of women. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic social and political status of women. This paper attempts to examine the policies initiated towards empowering women by government of India and also highlight the hindrances in the path of women empowerment and recommend suggestions for women empowerment in India.

Keywords: empowerment, empowering women, political status, upliftment

1. Introduction

Women empowerment can be defined as emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. According to Swami Vivekananda "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 only one wing". The inclusion of 'Women Empowerment' as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals underscores the relevance of this fact. In most of the countries of today's world every country considers gender equality and women empowerment to be essential for the development and well being of families, communities and nations. In the constitution of India the principle of gender equality is enshrined in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures in favour of women. Various legislations have been enacted and amended, policies and programmes formulated towards producing tangible outcomes that positively impact the lives of women. The establishment of National Women's Commission and State Women's Commissions were important milestones in the direction of women empowerment in India. Further the draft National Policy for the Empowerment of women (2016) marks an important step taken by the Government for accelerating the pace of women empowerment.

2. Objective of the study

- To take a view of government policies that have been undertaken for women's economic and social transformation.
- To identify the challenges in the path of women empowerment in India.
- To offer suggestion for women empowerment in India.

3. Methodology

As the objectives suggest, the paper is an evaluative and

descriptive one. It needs secondary information to achieve the objectives. Secondary data are collected from various published sources such as journals, internet, reports, books etc.

4. Analysis of the study

4.1 Various government policies that have been undertaken for women

i) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save girl child, educate girl child) is Central Government Sponsored Scheme by Government of India launched in 2015. The prime goal of the scheme is to generate awareness and improving the efficiency of welfare services for women. The scheme aims to Celebrate the Girl Child & Enable her Education. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme has been introduced to address the issue declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR). This scheme is being implemented through a national campaign and focused multi-sectoral action in 100 selected districts low in CSR, covering all States and UTs. This scheme is implemented by the joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The objectives of this scheme are as follows:

1. To prevent gender biased sex selective elimination.
2. To ensure survival & protection of the girl child.
3. To ensure education of the girl child.

ii) Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

The PMMVY, previously Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), is a maternity benefit programme run by the government of India. It was launched in 2010. The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) is a maternity benefits scheme implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. The scheme is for the pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births to contribute to a better enabling environment by providing conditional cash transfer for improved health and nutrition and to also promote health and

nutrition seeking behaviour in them.

It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices. It provides cash maternity benefit to the women. In 2013, the scheme was amended to cater to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), recognising food and nutritional needs of pregnant women. The cash entitlement was also increased to Rs 6,000.

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- a. To promoting appropriate practice, care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, safe delivery and lactation
- b. To encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and Young Child feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months; and
- c. To providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers in order to contribute to better enabling environment

iii) Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme

The Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme was revamped in 2006. The present scheme will provide assistance to NGOs for running crèches for infants (0-6 years) and would provide assistance to ensure healthcare facilities, supplementary nutrition, immunisation etc. for running a creche for 25 infants for eight hours. In today's economy there has been a rising need for women to add to the household income of the family in order to keep them afloat. Hence there have been a larger number of opportunities for the employment of women. Working women require support with regard to the care of their younger children especially infants. Day care is essential to the needs of both mothers and younger children. Creche and Day Care Services are not only required by working mothers but also women belonging to poor families, who require support and relief for childcare as they struggle to cope with the burden of activities, within and outside the home. A creche is a facility through which parents able to leave their children while they are at work and where children are provided the stimulating environment for their holistic development. Creches are developed in such a way that they provide group care to children, usually up to 6 years of age, who need care, guidance and supervision away from their home during the day.

The main objectives of this scheme are as follows:

- a. To provide day-care facilities for children (6 months to 6 years) of working mothers in the community.
- b. To promote physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (Holistic Development) of children.
- c. To educate and empower parents /caregivers for better childcare.
- d. To provide sleeping facility for children.
- e. Early stimulation for children below 3 years and pre-school education for 3 to 6 years old children.

iv) One Stop Centre Scheme for women

The One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC) is implemented since 1st April 2015 which supports women who are affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical,

sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race, and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal. OSC are set up in each State/UT. This scheme facilitates access to an integrated range of services including medical, legal, and psychological support. The OSC is integrated with Helpline No. 181 and other existing helplines. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal, services could be referred to OSC through these helplines.

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- a. To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof.
- b. To facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counseling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.

v) Scheme for Working Women-Hostel, Day Care Centre and Medical aid

The many more women are leaving their homes in search of employment in big cities as well as urban and rural industrial clusters. One of the main difficulties faced by such women is lack of safe and conveniently located accommodation. Hence this scheme has been initiated by the Government of India. This scheme aims to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments.

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

To promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist.

vi) Women Helpline Scheme

Scheme for universalization of women Helpline is meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence. This scheme is being implemented since from 01-04-2015 by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. From the past few years there is a huge increase in the crime rate against women in the society. Crime is not only in the form of harassment or something. Women is threatened everywhere e.g. from eve teasing, chain snatching, acid attacks, domestic violence to sexual harassment at work place. Today women feels much unsecured and thus to make her feel comfortable police department came up with a tech solution. They launched an initiative called "Help Emergency Assistance Rescue Terminal" (HEART) with which whoever women register herself with the service will have a toll free number (181) and whenever required, a women has to call on that number and immediately the software led application will reach the spot within 2 minutes. Since its launching HEART reported many complaints and is helping women's out there faithfully.

The objectives of the Scheme are:

- a. To provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence seeking support and information
- b. To help crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral

to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO)/OSC.

- c. To provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes and programmes available to the woman affected by violence, in her particular situation within the local area in which she resides or is employed.

vii) Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The STEP Programme is a 100% Central Sector Scheme. The ministry has been administering this scheme since 1986-87. Under this scheme, Training is provided to poor and marginalized women in traditional trades which are largely in the informal sector. The Programme of STEP advocates the objective of extending training for up-gradation of skills and employment for women through a variety of action-oriented projects. STEP Programme has been introduced to address occupational aspirations of poor women who do not have the opportunity of formal skill training. This scheme emphasis on Skill Development for self or wage employment because Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development of a country.

The objectives of this scheme are as below:

- a. To provide skills that give employability to women.
- b. To provide competencies and skills that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs.
- c. To upgrade the skills of poor and marginalized women.
- d. To provide employment to them on a sustainable basis.

viii) Mahila E-Haat

Mahila E-Haat is an online marketing platform where women entrepreneurs/ self-help groups/NGOs can exhibit and sell products/ services they have manufactured through a web portal specifically created for the purpose. The platform was launched on March 7, 2016 with an investment of about Rs 10 lakh by Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women & Child Development. The products and services of women vendors/ participants are displayed on the RMK website along with its description, images, price and contact details of the vendors. Consumers can directly contact the women vendors and purchase the products online.

Objectives of the scheme:

- a. Mahila E-Haat is an initiative for meeting needs of women entrepreneurs.
- b. This startup Rashtriya Mahila Kosh website leverages technology for showcasing products c) made/manufactured/sold by women entrepreneurs.
- c. They can even show their services of their creative potential. This unique e-platform will strengthen the socioeconomic empowerment of women.
- d. To act as a catalyst by providing a web-based marketing platform to the women entrepreneurs to directly sell their products.
- e. To support 'Make in India' through online marketing platform.

ix) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSFAG)-'SABLA'

A centrally sponsored scheme was approved by the government on 16 August, 2010. The scheme is being implemented in 200 districts across the country on a pilot basis. In the remaining districts, Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) continues to be operational as before. However, SABLA has completely replaced Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) as all districts of NPAG are now part of the SABLA. The scheme aims at vocational training for girls above 16 years of age for their economic empowerment.

The main objectives of the scheme are as follows:

- a. Life Skill Education and accessing public services.
- b. Vocational training for girls aged 16 and above under National Skill Development Programme (NSDP).
- c. The successful implementation of SABLA requires convergence with development activities/ schemes of other Departments such as health, education, youth affairs, labour, PRIs etc.

4.2 Challenges in case of women empowerment in India

- **Inequality and mortality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually a high mortality rate in women. As a result women population is reducing further especially in India and other Asian countries.
- **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in significant manners all across the globe. In India for example sharing burden of housework, childcare and manual works are usually done by women.
- **Lack of Political Will:** The still pending Women's Reservation Bill in parliament underscores the lack of political will to empower women politically.
- **Implementation Gap:** Through all these years, the importance is given on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes for women empowerment, but paid less attention to the proper monitoring system and implementation. For example despite the presence of The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technologies Act and various health programmes like Janani Suraksha Yojana and National Rural Health Mission (NHRM), our country has a skewed sex ratio and a high maternal mortality rate (MMR).
- **People's perspective:** The bias perspective against women by people is one of the most important cause that hinder women empowerment. The discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls, hence female infanticide is a common practice in India.
- **Less participation of women in decision making process:** Only a few women are entering into decision making process, that alone will not lead to empowerment.
- **Education:** According to 2011 census of India 82.14 % of adult men are educated, but only 65.46 % of adult women are literate. The gender bias in higher education hit women hard in employment and top leadership in any field.

4.3 Suggestions for empowerment of women in case of India

- **Awareness:** Awareness projects should be composed for making mindfulness among ladies particularly having a place with weaker areas about their rights.
- **Proper implementation of Government policies:** Strict execution of government programmes is one of the necessary conditions for empowering women.
- **People's mindset:** Only the government initiatives alone is not sufficient for women empowerment. It is necessary to change the mindset of people towards women.
- **Spread of Education :** Education of women is needed the most important component for women empowerment. Although there has been increase in enrolment rates of Girls, effort should be made all level so that all girls of the country able to get educational facilities.
- **Elimination of discrimination:** Complete elimination of discrimination from childhood in education, access to social services at work place, in family etc. will work wonders in improving their abilities on par with men.
- **Provide similar criteria:** Employing similar criteria like equal pay for equal work, same criteria for appraisal, similar level of hierarchy along career progress will give the women the sense of belonging and improving overall decision making.
- **Take help from different organization:** Take help from NGOs, media to run a campaign of respecting women and make sure that they are treated equal at their work places.
- **Responsibility of teachers and parents:** Teachers and parents should treat girl students equal to boy students. Empowerment is only possible from participation in the process and that can only be achieved with the change of mindsets and giving them equal opportunities.
- **Positive and inclusive environment:** Creating positive and inclusive environment from childhood so that at later stages there is no impediments in their thinking process.
- **Freedom to expression:** Freedom of expression in the society will create new energy and improve their logical thinking.

5. Conclusion

Women represent half of the world's population and gender inequality exists almost in every nation. Women empowerment is not possible without co-operation from the society as a whole. Mindset of the people is necessary to change towards women. People should remember that women empowerment will take place at a rapid pace only when men understand that it will be good for men and also it will be good for families and nation.

Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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