

# IMPORTANCE AND PROGRESSIVE STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT TO INDIAN SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** “Woman is an incarnation of ‘Shakti’—the Goddess of Power. If she is bestowed with education, India’s strength will double. Let the campaign of ‘KanyaKelavni’ be spread in every home; let the lamp of educating daughters be lit up in every heart”- Narendra Modi

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution 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 of positive discrimination in favour of women. ‘Empowerment’ may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives and developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. It is a burning issue all over the world. “Women empowerment” and “women equality with men” is a universal issue. It refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Present article will discuss about importance and strategies of women empowerment with various initiatives taken by Government of India for empowering women. In the past decades, the health and education levels of women and girls in developing in the country have improved men and boys. Progress and developments are helps to women for bringing to the new women society with ideal role in equality.

**Keywords:-** Importance, progressive, strategies, Women, Empowerment, Indian, society.

## INTRODUCTION

The term “empowerment of women” refers to the process of providing power to woman to become free from the control of others, that is, to assume power to control her own life and to determine her own conditions. “empowerment of women” could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

**Women Empowerment** refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- Determine financial and economic choices,
- Freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- Have equal social status in the society and rights for social and economic justice,
- Have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- Get equal opportunity for education & make their own choices and decisions,
- Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
- Get safe and comfortable working environment,

## Empowered Women’s Characteristics

- Empowered women define their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern industrial societies.
- Empowered women maintain equal mindedness. They act out roles that challenge male dominance. They respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good.
- Empowered women use their talent to live fulfilling lives. They not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.
- Empowered women maintain their strength on the face of pressures from the religion and work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women.
- Empowered women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves, they do not derive their sense of being from male authorities nor do they live vicariously through men.

## A Dimensions and Parameters of Women Empowerment

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

- ✚ The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;
- ✚ The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;
- ✚ The economic component requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;
- ✚ The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change;
- ✚ There is a physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

## B The parameters of women empowerment are:

- Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
- Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.
- Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.
- Building a positive image of women in the society and recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
- Developing ability among women to think critically.
- Fostering decision-making and collective action.
- Enabling women to make informed choices.
- Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.
- Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.
- Elimination of discrimination against women's participation in the areas of:
 

✓ Access to food	✓ Access to credit
✓ Equal wages	✓ Control over savings, earnings and resources
✓ Property rights	✓ Guardianship and custody of children and their maintenance
✓ Family resources	
✓ Freedom of movement and travel	
- Gender sensitisation training in schools, colleges and other Professional institutions for bringing about institutional changes.

## C Qualitative Indicators for women empowerment:

- ❖ increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
- ❖ increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
- ❖ increase in personal leisure time and time for child care;
- ❖ increase on decrease of workloads in new programmes;
- ❖ change in roles and responsibility in family and community;
- ❖ visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
- ❖ responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
- ❖ visible changes in women's participation level attending meetings, participating and demanding participation;
- ❖ increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
- ❖ increase access to and ability to gather information;
- ❖ formation of women collectives;
- ❖ positive changes in social attitudes;
- ❖ awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;
- ❖ women's decision-making over her work and income

## D. Components of Women Empowerment:

- ✚ Acquiring knowledge and an understanding of gender/power relations and ways in which these relations may be changed;
- ✚ Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life;
- ✚ Gaining the ability to generate choices and thereby acquiring leverage and bargaining power;
- ✚ Developing the ability to generate, organise or influence the direction of social change to create more just social and economic orders nationally and internationally.

## Objectives of Women Empowerment

- To identify gaps in the empowerment of women, development of children and adolescents;

- Create a national network of public, private and NGO centres for delivering reproductive and child health services free to any client;
- To create an enabling environment through convergence with other programmes;
- To open more child care centres for working women and expand the availability of safe abortion care;
- To use energy saving devices to reduce drudgery of women;
- To identify the ways in which the effects of policies and programmatic interventions to promote women's empowerment have been measured;
- To improve access to sanitation, drinking water, fuel, wood and fodder for women;
- To develop health management and health package at all levels;
- To improve accessibility and quality of maternal and child health care services;
- To identify the evidence on how women's empowerment affects important development outcomes such as health, education, fertility behaviour, income levels.
- Supporting community activities package for women;
- To improve and increase clinical and contraception delivery services;
- To organise educational and empowerment programmes for girls and women;
- To train resource persons, animators and trainers for activities visualised;
- To conduct and promote experimentations and innovations and research in the problems and programmes of empowerment of rural women;
- To increase awareness in women, for their development to use their talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole;
- To develop the skills for self-decision- taking capabilities in women and to allow them to present their point of view effectively in society;
- To create awareness among women to be truly ambitious and to dream for betterment;
- To make efforts in organising the women for fighting against the problems and difficulties related to them;
- To integrate socio-economic activities with concern for health and environment protection in the light of the rural women culture.

#### **Initiatives taken for Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups and Women in Difficult Circumstances**

- ⇒ Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation
- ⇒ Integrated Child Development Scheme
- ⇒ National Rural Health Mission
- ⇒ Janani Suraksha Yojana
- ⇒ Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- ⇒ Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances
- ⇒ Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)
- ⇒ Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)
- ⇒ Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- ⇒ Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)
- ⇒ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- ⇒ Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)—A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme
- ⇒ Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)—Sabla Swayam Siddha
- ⇒ Scheme for Working Women Hostel
- ⇒ STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women)
- ⇒ Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
- ⇒ Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)
- ⇒ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

#### **Need and importance of Women Empowerment**

✚ **Equally competent and intelligent:** Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities.

✚ **Under-employed and unemployed:** Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.

✚ **Talented:** Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large.

✚ **Overall development of society:** The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also help develop the society.

- ✚ **Reduce Poverty:** Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. Sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women helps the family to come out of poverty trap.
- ✚ **National Development:** Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every spheres including medical science, social service, engineering, etc.
- ✚ **Economic Benefits:** Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Unlike earlier days when they stayed at home only and do only kitchen stuffs, nowadays, they roam outside and also earns money like the male members of the society. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy.
- ✚ **Reduction in domestic violence:** Women Empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than an educated women.
- ✚ **Reduction in corruption:** Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption.
- ✚ **Irreplaceable in some sectors:** Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.

### The role of women's economic empowerment

In the past decades, the health and education levels of women and girls in developing countries have improved a great deal--in many cases they are catching up to men and boys. But no such progress has been seen in economic opportunity: women continue to consistently trail men in formal labour force participation, access to credit, entrepreneurship rates, income levels, and inheritance and ownership rights. This is neither fair nor smart economics. Under-investing in women limits development, slows down poverty reduction and economic growth.

A host of studies suggest that putting earnings in women's hands is the intelligent thing to do to speed up development and the process of overcoming poverty.

**This time of economic crisis poses particular risks for women and girls:** When economies start to crumble, women are often the first to suffer. The jobs and incomes lost disproportionately affect women; mothers can no longer find credit through micro-finance institutions and are pushed from the informal sector into subsistence work; girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school to lend a hand at finding more resources for the household; and when families have to tighten their belts, girls are more likely to be become malnourished.

The World Bank identified 33 developing countries where women and girls in poor households are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the global economic and food crises. Fifteen of these, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, are likely to see a particularly dangerous mix for women and girls, with slowing economic growth, fewer girls in school, and higher levels of infant and child mortality. The World Bank now projects an additional 200,000 to 400,000 infant deaths per year between **2009 and 2015** if the crisis persists. It is imperative to continue to protect girls and women through this crisis to avoid a reversal of the past decades' gains and build the human capital of the next generation. But women in developing countries are not only vulnerable or victims: if provided opportunity, they can be important agents of change and recovery.

Investing in women is a smart way to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis and help rebuild the economies of the world. In its response to the crisis, the World Bank is looking to safeguard long-term investments in the social sectors so that gains in schooling, health and social protection are not reversed while also supporting women's earnings through better access to agricultural inputs and credit lines amongst a host of measures.

### Women's Empowerment Opportunities in India

The empowerment of marginalized women through education, advocacy of rights, and the creation of vocational opportunities is essential to the sustained growth in India. Interns, volunteers, and donors work with FSD to provide support for women's empowerment programs that:

- Create village self-help groups in which women independently establish financial institutions that manage profit-making programs.
- Help a Women's Empowerment Project that provides training for members, holds quarterly meetings, and provides vocational support.
- Educate the public about women's issues to ensure that local women receive equal opportunities and compensation, while promoting gender sensitivity.
- Assist an organization's Community Action for Safe Motherhood Program, which provides training and on-going technical support to NGOs on community-based information and service for adolescents.
- Assess the success of past women's leadership programs and make suggestions for improvements.
- Assist projects that focus on mobilizing local women to protect natural resources by controlling farmland development, composting, and preserving water.
- Establish workshops for skills that introduce microenterprises to those in tribal communities.

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

It is disheartening to note that the phrase "empowerment of Women" is considered as a mere phase in the multistage process of giving women what they really deserve. The very mention about "empowerment" clearly indicates the upper hand men enjoy in the social structure. But India has come a long way in empowering women. According to Upanishads, the primary duty of women

is to be in the service of her husband. We now talk about one third seats for women in the highest decision making body in the country (parliament). India has come a long way.

#### Five specific global challenges:

- ❖ Demography
- ❖ Leadership and conflict
- ❖ Food Security and Agriculture
- ❖ Sustainability and Resource Scarcity

**Some good Prospects :** Some of the good policy steps taken by our government in the area of women empowerment.

➤ Firstly, the move to reserve one-third seats in the parliament for women could probably be the boldest and biggest step taken by Indian government in the area of women empowerment. The bill, if passed would result in more than 180 seats in the lower house occupied by women compared to less than 30 occupied currently. This might also produce a "Trickledown effect" where even the state governments would pass a similar bill to reserve 1/3rd seats for women in the State Legislatures.

➤ Secondly, to provide integrated social empowerment of women, the government initiated a scheme called as "Swayamsidha" in 2001 which helps them in establishing self-reliant Women's self-help groups(SHG's) The objective is to achieve all-round empowerment of women by ensuring direct access and control over resources.

➤ Another initiative is a program called as STEP(Support to Training and Employment Program for Women). The objective of this program is to empower women by provide sustainable employment opportunities.

#### Many Tough Challenges

As we see, government is taking some concrete steps in empowering women by helping women to help themselves and their families. But these programs are not sufficient.

#### The government brining change in the attitude of a patriarchy society. Here are some bitter answers:

- ❖ The maternal mortality rate in India is the second highest in the world. India accounts for more than 25% of all maternal deaths in the world.
- ❖ In a survey conducted by WHO, more than 80% of pregnant Indian women are found to be anaemic. This results in exceptionally high rates of child malnutrition. Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children, perpetuating the cycle
- ❖ Only 39% of Indian women attend primary schools. Most families pull them out of out of school, either to help out at home or from fear of violence.
- ❖ While women are guaranteed equality under the constitution, legal protection has little effect in the face of prevailing patriarchal traditions. Women lack power to decide who they will marry, and are often married off before they reach the age of 18.

As we see, the challenges we face in empowering women are far away from the prospects of development programs initiated by our government. As we progress from a developing nation towards a developed nation, every care must be taken to compositely develop and empower women along the way to stand true to what our great **Jawaharlal Nehru said "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"**

#### Women Representation in 16th LokSabha

The 16th LokSabha has 61 women members, the highest in history. speaker of 16th LokSabha is again a woman, SumitraMahajan. The presentRajyaSabha has 29 women members. The seven women ministers in the46-member Council of Ministers have reinforced the new government'sagenda of women empowerment. Six of the 23 Cabinet ministers arewomen, claiming almost a 25 per cent share. Three of them — SmritiIrani(HRD), NirmalaSitharaman (Commerce and Industry) and HarsimratKaurBadal (Food Processing) — are going to hold their maiden portfolios asministers. The age profile of these ministers - the youngest SmritiIrani at38 and the oldest minister of the Cabinet NajmaHeptullah at 74 — adds tothe spectrum. SushmaSwaraj has got the key position of External AffairsMinister and is also the first woman after three decades to be a member ofthe all powerful Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). This may raiseexpectations of India's female population to break the glass ceiling in manyother bastions so far dominated by men.Thus road map for women empowerment is there but still we havemiles to go on this path of empowerment. We hope that in coming yearsahead women empowerment will prove its worth. Women are an integralpart of a society. They play an important role in determining the destiny ofa nation. It has been rightly said by Swami Vivekanand, "The Bestthermometer to the progress of nation is its treatment of women". Therefore,due recognition to them in the society and their greater involvement insocio-economic and political affairs becomes all the more important. Every person should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

### The different phases India took in the women empowerment is here:

- Ancient India - Primary duty of women is "Husband Service"
- Medieval India- Don't let women out. Don't let her express. If her husband dies, she should die too.
- Modern India Pre Independence- Guys let's stop Sati. Let her stay inside the house forever after her husband dies!
- 1950s- Lets send women children to schools and colleges.
- 1960-Dowry Prohibition Act
- 1990s-Women should occupy responsible positions in the social structure
- 2001- Women's Empowerment Year
- 2010- 1/3rd seats should be reserved for Women in parliament.

The chart above summarizes the position of women in Indian society at various points in time. Now like this way the government is improving empowerment of women's through Economically.

### National mission of Empowerment of women

The Committee of Governors (CoG) set up to study and recommends strategies for speedy socio-economic empowerment of women recommended the "Establishment of National Mission for socio-economic empowerment of Women". National Mission for Empowerment of Women was operationalized during the financial year 2011-12 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in April 2011. The focus was to bring convergence of efforts through inter-sect oral coordination amongst different ministries and programmes with Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) as the nodal for achieving holistic empowerment of women.

Following the restructuring of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) during the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan period, NMEW was approved for continuation as a sub-scheme of the Umbrella Scheme for Protection and Development of Women.

The revised NMEW Scheme aims to achieve holistic empowerment of women through convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Department of Government of India as well as State Governments. Under the revised Scheme, technical support to Ministry of Women and Child Development is being provided by domain experts who are involved in the implementation and monitoring of new initiatives of the Ministry like BetiBachaoBetiPadhao (BBBP Scheme), One Stop Centres, Women Helpline etc. and also facilitates convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments with focus on women. At the national level experts engaged in the area of:

- a) Poverty alleviation economic empowerment,
- b) Health and nutrition,
- c) Gender budgeting & Gender mainstreaming,
- d) Gender rights gender based violence & law enforcement,
- e) Empowerment of vulnerable & marginalised groups,
- f) Social empowerment & education,
- g) Media and advocacy and
- h) Information technology

The scheme aims strengthen the conceptual and programmatic basis of women centric schemes/programmes implemented by the MWCD, other Ministries and State Government with the mechanism for convergence. Training & Capacity Building to enhance and strengthen understanding of gender issues, build a Resource Pool (trainers) at the National and State level to bridge gaps between knowledge and practice will be the other focus area of NMEW.

The current theme of the programme is "A Girl Today, a Successful Entrepreneur Tomorrow". Through the ideal aims to encourage young girls to contribute to the country's economic development and growth by becoming the creators of wealth and job opportunities.

### Broad Policy Strategies to women empowerment

- **Competencies in Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming:** Capacity building for gender analysis and mainstreaming in all national and sectorial policies, plans, programmes and budgets and for all ministries, departments, National Assembly and the Judiciary will be enhanced in order to achieve gender equality in the development process
- **Gender and Governance:** The policy endeavours to strengthening women's meaningful participation in and ownership of national development processes through concerted investment in women's analytical capacity, and donors' support. Representation of women and girls in decision making structures and committees across all sectors of development work will be supported.

- **Capacity Strengthening of Gender Machinery:** Strengthening the capacity and capability of the Ministry for Gender and Women's Empowerment and its executing arms to exercise effective leadership over the coordination of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Gender and Women Empowerment Policy will be prioritized.
- **Gender Budgeting:** Advocate for gender responsive budgeting and the allocation of adequate resources and public expenditure for all sectorial programmes, is critical for the achievement of the goal and objectives of the policy.
- **Advocacy:** Mobilization at all levels for social transformation on gender equality issues and for the implementation of the gender and women empowerment policy.
- **Sensitization and Public Education on Gender and issues affecting Women:** using the media, meetings to create awareness on gender and women empowerment issues as well as on the causes and consequences of gender-based violence and other human rights violation, and mechanisms geared at eliminating and managing cases of gender based Violence.
- **Awareness on New AID Modalities and Role of Gender Equality:** Creating public awareness on the new donor funding architectures such as the aid modalities and effectiveness and the sector-wide approaches (Swaps) and ensuring that gender is mainstreaming in all these processes is fundamental for the policy.
- **Mainstreaming Elements of the Policy in Sect oral Work:** Advocating for the full integration of the Plan of Action of the Gender and Women Empowerment Policy in national and sect oral plans of actions is critical.
- **Gender Responsive Legislation:** The policy emphasises the importance of advocating for law reforms and the enactment of gender responsive legislation.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthening partnerships with development partners, civil society organizations, private sector, the Media and community leaderships for gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women and girls" men and boys will be forged.

### Conclusion

To sum up, planned development has been considered to be the most effective way of solving the numerous problems comes in the way of eradicating poverty, reducing imbalances and preventing discriminations among vast number of poor people living in rural areas, especially of rural poor women folk. In this process various policies and programmes intended for empowerment of women has been implemented for which special budget allocations are made in Five Year Plans and government policies. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. Various schemes are being implemented to uplift socio-economic status of rural poor women and paving a path for their empowerment. the government has been making sincere efforts to empower women in socio economic and politico-cultural aspects, so that a welfare state and a prosperous nation can be built.

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