

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract: The Third International Women's Conference at Nairobi (1985) has defined "women empowerment as a re-distribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women." Empowerment is the process of enabling women to think, take action and control work in an independent way. It includes control over resources viz., physical, human, intellectual and financial and over ideology like beliefs, values and attitudes of an individual. Women Empowerment in India is entirely dependent on variables like geographical location (rural/urban), educational status, social status (caste and class) and financial status. Policies on women empowerment exist at national, state and local levels in many sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence and political participation. But for holistic coverage of these schemes, proper implementation and monitoring is needed.

Gender Discrimination is a devastating reality in developing countries like India. Women are subjugated at home, work place, market or any other public places. Thus, to overcome these atrocities against women they must be empowered with knowledge and skill. The government has been giving encouragement for economic, social and political empowerment and capacity building of women in the country. A remarkable shift in the government approach towards women's issues has been seen from welfare to development of women.

Keywords: Empowerment, Constitution, Discrimination, Atrocities, Holistic, Panchayati Raj.

Introduction

Women empowerment can be defined as a change in women's life, development of inherent capabilities, greater self confidence, and, a satisfying human life. It means there are positive changes in external qualities like education, health, employment, mobility, awareness, status in the society, participation in decision making and internal qualities such as self awareness and self confidence. The Constitution has granted equality to women and also given rights to the government to adopt various measures and laws to create positive discrimination in favour of women. The government evolved several plans, programmes, laws and schemes for strengthening and empowering women and their agencies and organizations. The aim of these programmes and schemes has been women's advancement and empowerment in different spheres of life.

The measures suggested for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women as a part of MDGs are strengthening post-primary education for girls, investment in improving infrastructure, provision of loans and financial assistance for income generation, guarantee of property and inheritance rights, representation in national and local bodies, provision of basic health care and combating violence against women. The GOI declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment and announced the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women.

Objectives

1. To find the present status of women in India.
2. To review various schemes launched by the government for women empowerment.
3. To examine the achievement of different schemes for women empowerment.
4. To suggest certain effective measures for overall empowerment of women in India.

Methodology

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources of data such as annual reports of Ministry of Women and Child Development, economic survey, government reports, Kurukshetra and Yojana Journals, and, published research papers. Average and percentage are simple statistical tools used for calculation of data.

Constitutional Guarantee to Women Rights

The Constitution of India gives various rights to women such as guarantees of equality to all women (Article 14), no discrimination by the Government (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)), renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(a)(c)), making special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15(3) and securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).

State of Women Empowerment

Developed human resources are essential for sustainable and long-term economic growth. Female population in India is nearly 47 per cent of total population. If the potential and talents of the women remain underdeveloped or underutilized, the economy will

never grow at a faster rate. Healthy and educated women have healthier and educated children, creating a conducive environment for rapid development. There are various benefits of gender equality in social, economic and political fields. Women should be involved more in administration, politics and decision-making. They make not only better decisions but their decisions are beneficial for large members of the society

Table 1 below clearly shows the low level of attainment of women in the diverse fields of achievement in India. Except the political empowerment, India's rank in other three indices is very low. Out of 142 countries, India's overall rank in 2014 was 114, which shows country's dismal position at global level. The political empowerment ranks was quite high due to the 73rd and 74th Indian Constitutional Amendments which provide greater opportunity to women to take active part in politics. Overall situation is not satisfactory which needs some urgent steps to be taken for improvement of economic, educational and health indices.

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Rankings of India.

Sr. No.	Gender Gap Sub Indices	2014		2012	
		Rank	Score	Rank	Score
1	Economic Participation and Opportunity	134	0.4096	123	0.4588
2	Educational Attainment	126	0.8503	121	0.8525
3	Health and Survival	141	0.9366	134	0.9612
4	Political Empowerment	15	0.3855	17	0.3343
5	Overall Index	114	0.6455	105	0.6442

Source: World Economic Forum, Kurukshetra, March 2015, p. 37.

Educational Achievement

Education is a means of empowerment of women in India. It can bring about a positive attitudinal change among the people in general and women in particular. It is therefore, crucial to provide education both general and skill based for the socio-economic and political progress of the country. Sex ratio and literacy rate among male and female and also in rural and urban areas shows that female literacy rate is showing an increasing trend from 15 per cent to 65 per cent during 1961 to 2011. Sex ratio had shown shrinkage till 1991 and is again showed an increasing trend which was 940 in 2011.

Both rural and urban female literacy rates have shown rising trend since 1961 which were 59 per cent and 80 per cent respectively in 2011. Illiterate women have high levels of fertility, poor nutritional status, unemployment, low earning potential and little autonomy in the household. As compared to urban women, rural women have to face more challenges and difficulties. Superstition, rigid social norms, traditional family structures, out dated traditions and customs, preference of boy child over girl child, discrimination among male and female child are common problems in rural areas. Poverty is the biggest hindrance in women empowerment in India. In a BPL family, girls are the main victims; they are considered as burden on family, they are malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education, employment and other facilities. Education is, therefore, milestone of women empowerment. It enables women to respond to the challenges, to face the difficult situation, to confront their traditional role and change their socio-economic, political and cultural lives.

Table 2: Literacy Rate and Sex Ratio in India

Year	Literacy Rate	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate	Rural Female Literacy Rate	Urban Female Literacy Rate	Sex Ratio
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4	10.1	40.5	930
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0	15.5	48.8	930
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	21.7	56.3	934
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	30.6	64.1	927
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7	46.6	73.0	933
2011	72.9	64.6	64.6	58.8	80.0	940

Source: Kurukshetra, March 2015, p. 38.

Note: Sex Ratio is defined as number of females per 1000 males in the population.

Government has taken several initiatives to encourage the education of women and to dilute the gender bias in providing knowledge to women. The recent educational scheme launched by the government is 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao.'

Important Schemes and Programmes

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. 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.

Working Women Hostel Scheme (1972-73)

This scheme was launched in the year 1972-73. Under the Working Women Hostel Scheme, financial assistance is provided for construction and/or running of hostel in rented premises for working women. Working women are generally single, widowed, divorced, separated, and for those women who are under training for job. Married women also get the benefit of this scheme but condition is that her husband or immediate family does not reside in the same area. There is a provision of day care centre for children of the inmates of the hostel. Working Women are entitled to get hostel facilities provided their gross income per month should not exceed Rs. 50,000/- in metropolitan cities and Rs. 35,000/- per month in other places. Since its inception, 934 hostels have been sanctioned all over the country benefitting approximately 70,139 working women.

Support to Training and Employment Programme (1986-87)

The Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women' has been implemented since 1986-87 as a 'Central Sector Scheme'. The STEP aims to provide skills that increase employability to women. It also provides competencies and skills to become women self-employed/ entrepreneurs. The Scheme gives benefit to women who are 16 years and above. The assistance under this scheme is available for imparting skills related to employability and entrepreneurship in all sectors like agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, traditional crafts like embroidery, and zari, handicrafts, gems & jewellery, travel and tourism, hospitality, etc. This is a demand driven programme. Thus, proposals under this scheme are submitted by the eligible organizations and the ministry gives approvals after due scrutiny of the proposals. Under STEP, the funds are released to the implementing organizations. During 2015-16, 15,133 beneficiaries were covered and an amount of Rs. 1174 lakhs was released under the scheme.

National Commission for Women (1992)

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was constituted in 1992 as a statutory body at the National level to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of women. It covers almost all aspects of women's development. The Commission investigates and examines the legal safeguards and other laws provided for women under the Constitution. It also recommends to the Government to take necessary measures for effective implementation of laws and legal provisions. The Commission also reviews Existing provisions of the Constitution and other laws are reviewed and amendments are recommended to meet any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings. It looks into complaints relating to women and solves them with the help of appropriate authorities. It also takes suo-moto cognizance on issues related to deprivation of women's rights. The commission is can participate in the planning process and give advice for socio-economic development of women. It is empowered to inspect jails and remand homes where women are kept under custody.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001)

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women was announced in 2001 with the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Specific objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women are: (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential and capacities. (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil. (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making in social, political and economic life. (iv) Equal access to quality education at, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, health care and safety, social security and public office. (v) Strengthening legal systems to elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of women. (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all types of violence against women and the girl child. (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010)

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was initiated by the government on International Women's Day in 2010. The main objective was to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. The mission had to facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes. The mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the different central ministries and departments. The Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, i.e., a vision for holistic empowerment of Women. The statement of the mission is expressed as "To strengthen the processes which promote holistic development and empowerment of women, gender equality and gender justice through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes that impact women, forge synergy among various stakeholders and create an enabling environment conducive to social change."

The key strategies adopted by the NMEW, 2010 are: Inter-sectoral convergence of schemes for women; monitoring and review of progress of various schemes, strengthening institutional framework for greater efficiency, focused research, legislations and gender audits for policy making, investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, micro-credit and micro finance, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women, support to Panchayati Raj institutions; women's movements and community representatives for strengthening of local self governments, publicity on media and communication for behaviour change and social mobilization for gender equality. The major domain areas of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women are as follows: Poverty alleviation, economic empowerment of women, social empowerment and education, health and nutrition, gender rights, gender based violence and law, enforcement gender budgeting, gender mainstreaming and gender audit, empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups and women in difficult circumstances.

The focus areas of the NMEW are: Violence against women, declining child sex ratio, prevention of child marriage, trafficking, health and sanitation, drinking water, gender budgeting, right to education, elected women representatives, drudgery reduction, innovative financial inclusion, engendering livelihood programmes and training programmes. The NMEW Scheme was initially approved as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with 100% central funding. In 2013, the scheme was revised and approved as a subcomponent of the Umbrella Scheme for Protection and Development of Women with a budget of Rs. 225 crore for Twelfth Plan. NMEW Scheme is now being implemented on the basis of 60:40 centre-state sharing. The cost sharing ratio is 90:10 for North Eastern and Special Category States.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme (2013-14)

Girl child is an important asset for a nation. The Government has announced Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child. The Child Sex Ratio (CSR) has continually declined from 976 in 1961 to 927 in 2001 and further to 919 in 2011. It is injustice towards girl child, both pre birth and post birth discrimination against girls. Social discrimination against girls and misuse of diagnostic tools are responsible for low child sex ratio. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao is implemented through a national multimedia campaign in 100 selected districts with low CSR. Ministry of Women and Child Development is the Nodal Ministry for implementing. This joint Scheme is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development. The objectives of this scheme are to prevent gender biased sex selective elimination, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, and also ensure education of the girl child.

Strategies for Implementation

To implement a sustained Social Mobilization and Communication Campaign to create equal value for the girl child, to promote their education, place the issue of decline in Child Sex Ratio in public discourse, focus on Gender Critical Districts and Cities, intensive and integrated action, mobilize and train Panchayati Raj Institutions/ Urban local bodies/ Grass root workers local community/women's/youth groups, ensure service delivery schemes and programmes, enable inter-sectoral and inter-institutional convergence at District/Block/Grassroots level.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao is a new scheme to help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services for women. Initially, an amount of Rs. 100 crore are earmarked for this scheme. This programme ensure universalisation of ICDS, girls' attendance, equal care monitored, increase the girl's enrolment in secondary education from 76 percent in 2013-14 to 79 percent by 2017, provide girl's toilet in every school, promote a protective environment for girl children through implementation of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, train elected representatives, grassroots functionaries to mobilize communities to improve CSR and promote girl's education.

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative has two major components:

Media Campaign : The campaign is aimed at ensuring girls are born, nurtured and educated without discrimination and with equal rights. The Campaign will bringing together different stakeholders at national, state and district level for positive impact on CSR.

Multi-Sectoral action in 100 selected districts: Multi-Sectoral actions is taken together by concerned sectors, states and districts to improve the CSR. The 100 districts have been identified on the basis of low Child Sex Ratio with at least one district in each state. The three criteria adopted for selection of districts are: districts below the national average (87 districts), districts above national average but shown declining trend (8 districts) and districts above national average and shown increasing trend (5 districts).

Outcome of the Scheme is: Effective implementation of Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act to stop female foeticides, empowering the girl child through education and providing equal access to education, health, skill development and employment, enhancing the value of the girl child through awareness generation and use of media campaign, promoting the need for gender equality and changing the negative attitudes and behaviours of the society. This scheme is indeed an innovative step taken by the government to empower the women and to improve the condition of them in the society.

National Policy for Women (2017)

The National Policy for Women (NPW) 2017 is prepared and in the process of final approval from the Ministry. Women's empowerment has not only provided various welfare benefits to women, but they are now actively engaged in the development process. There have been many socio economic changes occurred in the country since 2001. The government has implemented

many progressive laws, policies, and programmes for women empowerment. Then also various socio-economic problems are persisted in the society which continue to hamper gender equality. The changes made in the new policy provides new many opportunities and possibilities for women's empowerment.

The policy has adopted socially inclusive approach for women which will bring the holistic empowerment of women. Various ministries and departments will integrate the key principles of gender equality into their prevailing policies, strategies and programmes. The draft National Policy for Women addresses the diverse needs of women such as health, food security and nutrition; education, employment, NRI women, soft power, service and other sectors, science and technology, governance and decision making, violence, and, creation of an enabling environment. Operational strategies for implementation of the National Policy for Women 2016 include framing of Action Plans at the national, state and local level; strengthening gender institutional architecture, reviewing/ harmonizing legislations, enacting new legislations, engaging with stakeholders for advocacy and awareness generation, strengthening institutionalization of gender budgeting and creating an effective gender based data base.

Conclusion

The National Commission for Women was set up to safeguard the legal rights and entitlement. The Constitution of India has given reservation of seats to women in local self governments like Panchayats and Municipalities for women's active participation in decision making at local levels. After Independence, the overall situation of women in India started to change and shown signs of positive change. However, the empowerment, development and gender equality remain limited to few pockets and among certain sections of society only. The success and effectiveness of gender equality aiming at empowerment of women depend on social, economic, political and cultural factors and also communities, families, bureaucrats, effective implementation, accountability and monitoring of women's programmes.

Regarding women empowerment, the UN Millennium Report on Education and Gender Equality pointed that "women should have equal capabilities, education and health status, equal access to resources and opportunities, for instance, property rights, ownership of land and employment opportunities." There are enormous issues and challenges for empowerment of women in India. Hence, the government has taken various measures from time to time to empower women in the country. In short, the advancement, development and empowerment of women in India will decide the status of women in the society.

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