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## Women empowerment through government policies and programmes: An Indian perspective

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### Abstract

The exploitation and discrimination of women can be seen all over the world. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Women play a very strategic role in the development of society as well as development of economy in general. Woman is the leader planner of the family, the first trainer; supplier of labour power and by playing focal role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. Women contribute directly or indirectly for economic development. Though the nature has given the power of reproduction especially to the women, the socio-economic status of women is so poor and the incidence of poverty is more on woman only. Empowering women is the only solution for all questions. Her potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, her status in the society must be improved and economically she should be strengthened. The poverty is the main cause for her low bargaining power hence poverty should be removed. Empowering women and removal of poverty go hand in hand. Woman if is educated and empowered, her potential power can be utilized for the economic development. Mahatma Gandhi says, "You educate a man, you educate an individual. You educate a woman, you educate an entire family".

**Keywords:** women empowerment, government policies, society, socio-culture, service sector

### 1. Introduction

Women constitute half the human resources and thus the economic wealth of the country and if about half the nation's human resource is neglected, the overall progress of the country would obviously be hampered. Recognizing the need for involving women in various development activities, the Government of India has initiated several affirmative measures by way of programmes and schemes to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative actions have brought about perceptible changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. The literacy rate of females, which was 8.86% in 1951 rose to 54.16% in 2001. Women's work participation rate, which was 19.7% in 1981, rose to 25.7% in 2001. The data base also brings out the areas where the progress has been slow if not retrograde. The sex ratio in the 0-6 year's age group dropped from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, which indicates that society still does not welcome a girl child and the preference rests with sons. Nearly 50% women get married before they attain 18 years of age, and 57.9% pregnant women and 56.2% married women suffer from anaemia. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is quite high, at 301 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2006. Thus, there is room for much more to be done to ameliorate the plight of women at the grass root level.

The extent of empowerment of women in the national hierarchy is determined largely by the three factors – her economic, social and political identity and their weightage. These factors are deeply intertwined and interlinked with many cross cutting linkages which imply that if efforts in even one dimension remain absent or weak, outcomes and momentum generated by the other components cannot be sustained as they will not be able to weather any changes or upheavals. It is only when all the three factors are simultaneously addressed and made compatible with each other can the woman be truly empowered. Therefore for holistic empowerment of the woman to happen - social, economic and political aspects impacting a woman's life must converge effectively.

### 2. Objectives of the study

The study has following objectives

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- To know the need of women empowerment in India.
- To study the status of women in India.
- To study the necessity of empowerment of women in India.
- To analyse the available schemes for women empowerment in India.

### **3. Research methodology**

This study is descriptive in nature. In my study we have used secondary data for the purpose of this research paper. The main sources of secondary data are annual general reports, journals, magazines, newspapers and concerned websites.

### **4. Need for women empowerment**

The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Women play a distinct role in the economic development. She is the chief architect of family, the first teacher; supplier of labour power and by playing main role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. In the visible and invisible form women contribute for economic development. The nature has given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women. She can create social, cultural and economic wonders. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. Often the women are victimized in the cases like rape, dowry harassments, sexual harassments, kidnapping, female infanticides and sex selective abortions, domestic violence, trafficking, etc. The verdicts of many of such cases go against women because of the non-availability of witness, discontinuation of suits, difficulty of proving the incidents etc. Hence she should be strengthened and her status should be improved; she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of hidden potential power for the economic development. Therefore empower the women.

### **5. Plans, policies and programmes for women**

In the process of poverty eradication and reducing gender discrimination, the governments have been implementing various schemes and programmes providing ways and means towards women development and empowerment. SHGs movement among such programmes has been proved successful in fulfilling its objectives. However, it is felt that the other schemes and programmes do have their prominent part in the process of women development and empowerment and which are being successfully implemented. In this regard the schemes and programmes intended for women development are briefed here under.

## **6. Schemes for economic empowerment**

### **6.1 Swa-Shakti**

The project jointly founded by IFAD, World Bank and the Government of India was launched in October, 1999 and culminated on 30th June, 2005. The objective of the program was to bring out socio-economic development and empowerment of women through promotion of women SHGs, micro credit and income generating activities. The project was conceived as a Pilot Project implemented in 335

blocks of 57 districts in 9 states. The project established 17,647 SHGs covering about 2, 44,000 women. This was a Centrally Sponsored Project.

### **6.2 Swayamsiddha**

This was an integrated scheme for women empowerment through formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) launched in February, 2001. The long term objective of the programme was holistic empowerment of women through a sustained process of mobilization and convergence of all the ongoing sectoral programmes by improving access of women to micro-credit, economic resources, etc. This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. The Scheme had been able to provide a forum for women empowerment, collective reflection and united action. The scheme was culminated in March, 2007. The programme was implemented in 650 blocks of the country and 67971 women SHGs have been formed benefiting 9, 89,485 beneficiaries. The scheme came to an end in March 2007.

It is proposed to take up Swayamsidha with a wider scope during the XI Plan. The schemes of Swayamsidha and Swashakti would be merged and implemented as Swayamsidha, Phase-II in the XI Plan. The lessons learnt in Swayamsiddha and Swa-Shakti would be incorporated in the universalized Swayamsiddha giving an integrated set of training inputs relating to social and economic empowerment, including skill development and training in traditional and non-traditional sectors.

### **6.3 Swawlamban Programme**

Economic Programme was launched in 1982-83 with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD). NORAD assistance was availed till 1996 – 97 after which the programme is being run with Government of India funds. The objective of the programme is to provide training and skills to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self-employment on sustained basis. The target groups under the scheme are the poor and needy women, women from weaker sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes etc. In order to ensure more effective implementation and for better monitoring/evaluation of the scheme, it has been transferred to the State governments from 1st April 2006 with the approval of Planning Commission.

### **7. Supports to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)**

This programme seeks to provide skills and new knowledge to poor women in the traditional sectors. Under this project, women beneficiaries are organized into viable and cohesive groups or cooperatives. A comprehensive package of services such as health care, elementary education, crèche facility, market linkages, etc. is provided besides access to credit. Skill development is provided in ten traditional skills amongst women. This is a Central Scheme launched in 1987. The Ministry is at present getting the programme evaluated. Based on the results of the evaluation, the scheme is proposed to be revamped. Further, the possibilities of providing training and skills to women both in traditional and non-traditional sectors and integrating with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh for credit linkages are being considered. A sum of Rs. 240 crore is proposed for the scheme in the XI Plan. Support Services for Needy Women

### 7.1 Hostel for Working Women

The Scheme of Hostel for Working Women envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel accommodation to working, single working woman, women working at places away from their home-town and for women being trained for employment. The scheme has been revised with following salient features:

- Financial assistance for construction of hostel building to be given only on public land.
- Financial assistance available for rent of the hostels runs in rented premises also.
- Provision for maintenance grant of hostel building (maximum 5.00 lakh) and one-time non-recurring grant for furnishings @ 7500/- per beneficiary.

State Government agencies, Urban Municipal Bodies, Cantonment Boards, Civil Society Organizations, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Self Help Groups, recognized Colleges/ Universities and Corporate or associations like CII, ASSOCHAM and FICCI included under the revised scheme.

The State Governments have been advised to disseminate the revised guidelines of the Scheme and send project proposals accordingly. Since its inception in 1972-73, under this scheme, 902 working women hostels have been sanctioned under the scheme all over the country benefiting about 67,284 working women.

### 7.2 Crèches

The Ministry runs a scheme of crèches that caters to the children of poor working women or ailing mothers. This provides a great help to women who are working as their children are being provided a safe environment when they are at work. The scheme is being covered in the Report of the Working Group on Child Development of this Ministry.

## 8. Relief, Protection and Rehabilitation to Women in Difficult Circumstances

### 8.1 Swadhar

This scheme was launched in 2001-2002 for providing relief and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The main objectives of the scheme are as follows:

- To provide primary need of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls living in difficult circumstances who are without any social and economic support.
- To provide emotional support and counseling to women.
- To rehabilitate destitute women socially and economically through education, awareness, skill upgradation and personality development.
- To arrange for specific clinical, legal and other support for women/girls in need of those interventions by linking and networking with other organizations in both Government and non-Government sectors on case to case basis.

Beneficiaries covered under the scheme are widows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail, women survivors of nature disaster, trafficked women, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence, mentally challenged and women with HIV/AIDS etc.

### 8.2 Compensation to Rape Victims

The Honorable Supreme Court in Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum vs. Union of India and others writ petition

(CRL) No. 362/93 had directed the National Commission for Women to evolve a 'scheme so as to wipe out the tears of unfortunate victims of rape'.

Accordingly NCW has drafted a scheme titled "Relief to and Rehabilitation of Rape Victims". It is proposed to initiate the scheme in the XI Plan. The budgetary requirement for the scheme in the XI Plan is estimated as Rs. 250 crore.

### 8.3 Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls-Sabla

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of adolescent Girls- Sabla, a comprehensive scheme for the holistic development of adolescent girls (AGs) of 11-18 years called Sabla was introduced in 2010. Sabla is being implemented in 205 selected districts across the country. Sabla has replaced the Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) and Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY). In the non-Sabla districts, KSY continues as before. Sabla scheme has two major components (i) Nutrition and (ii) Non Nutrition. The integrated package of services being provided to Adolescent Girls (AGs) under Sabla is as under:

- Nutrition provision (@ 5/- per day for 300 days in a year)
- Iron and Folic Acid supplementation (52 tablets annually)
- Health check-up and referral services
- Nutrition & health education
- Counseling/guidance on family welfare, child care practices, and home management.
- Life skills education and accessing public services
- Vocational training for girls aged 16 and above, under the National Skill Development Programme.

### 8.4 Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)

A Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme for pregnant and lactating women was introduced in October, 2010 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to contribute to better enabling environment by providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mothers. The Scheme envisages providing cash to Pregnant & Lactating (P&L) women during pregnancy and lactation. The scheme attempts to partially compensate for wage loss to Pregnant & Lactating women both prior to and after delivery of the child. The scheme is now covered under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) programme and under which 9 districts have been included under first phase of the implementation (where Aadhaar enabled cash transfer is to take place).

## 9. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)

The Ministry launched the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) in March, 2010 for coordinated assessment of current Government interventions and aligning future programmes so as to translate the National Policy on Empowerment of Women (NPEW) prescriptions into reality. The Mission was operationalized during 2011-12, with setting up of a National Resource Centre for Women (NRCW) within the Ministry. The Institutional mechanism under the Mission was operationalized with the setting up of the National Unit headed by the Additional Secretary and Mission Director. The State level institution consists of the State Mission

Authority (SMA) and State Resource Centre for Women (SRCW), which works in co-ordination with NMEW. As on date, 21 States have set up SRCWs.

## **10. Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme in Mid-Gangetic Plains**

### **10.1 Priyadarshini**

This programme was launched in 13 blocks spread over 5 districts in Uttar Pradesh and 2 districts in Bihar. The Programme aims at holistic empowerment (economic and social) of vulnerable groups of women and adolescent girls in the project area through formation of women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) and promotion of improved livelihood opportunities. Over 1, 00,000 households are to be covered under the project and 7,200 SHGs will be formed during the project period ending 2016-17. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the lead programme agency for the implementation through engagement of Resource NGOs and Field NGOs (FNGOs).

### **10.2 Ujjawala**

This scheme was launched by the Ministry on 4 December, 2007 and is being implemented mainly through NGOs. The Scheme has five components—Prevention, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Re-Integration and Repatriation of trafficked victims for commercial sexual exploitation. Some of the activities under the Scheme are:

- Formation of community vigilance groups, adolescents groups, awareness creation and preparation of IEC material, holding workshops, etc.
- Safe withdrawal of victims from the place of exploitation.
- Rehabilitation of victims by providing them safe shelter, basic amenities, medical care, legal aid, vocational training and income generation activities.
- Re-integration of victims into society.
- Provide support to cross-border victims for their safe repatriation to their country of origin.

## **11. Recognition of women**

### **11.1 Stree shakti puraskar**

Indian women have taken on different roles and excelled in many fields. In most cases, success has been achieved, to recognize such success stories publicly so that these women become role models for the further generations of Indian women, the Government of India has instituted six national awards titled 'Stree Shakti Puraskar'.

Five of these awards given in the names of Jhansi Ki Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kannagi, Rani Gaidnliu Zeliang, Devi Ahilya Bai, and Mata Jija Bai were instituted in 1999. Another sub-category of Stree Shakti Award, which is named after Rani Rudramma Devi, has been added from the year 2007. Each award carries a cash prize of ` 3.00 Lakh and a citation.

## **12. Laws on Women**

### **12.1 The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition), Act, 1986**

The Indecent Representation of Women Act, 1986 was enacted with the specific objective of prohibiting indecent representation of women in advertisement, publication, writing and painting or in any other manner and references that are derogatory to the dignity of women.

### **12.2 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal), Bill 2012**

The constitutional guarantee of gender equality includes protection from sexual harassment and the right to work with dignity. The Bill seeks to cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them from sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector. Women who are employed as well as those who enter the workplaces as clients, customers and apprentices, students in educational institutions and patients in hospitals etc are also sought to be covered under the Bill.

### **12.3 The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005**

Violence against women takes various forms, including physical, economic, social, and psychological. The PWDVA is a civil law which seeks to provide immediate support to women victim of domestic violence in the form of shelter, medical facility and reliefs in the nature of protection, residence and compensation. The law also including women who face domestic violence in relationships other than matrimonial relationships like daughters, mothers, sisters and those involved in marriage like relationships and providing a woman's right to reside in the shared household. The Act came into force on 26th October 2006.

### **12.4 The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 Act has been in implementation since 1961 to prohibit the evil practice of giving and taking of dowry. The Act underwent amendments in the year 1984 and again in 1986. The National Commission for Women in 2009 has recommended amendments to the Act and amendment of section 304 B of Indian Penal Code in order to strengthen the anti-dowry laws. The recommendations are under examination in the Ministry.

### **12.5 National Commission for Women**

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was constituted on 31.1.1992 as an apex level statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990. The main task of the Commission is to study and monitor all matters relating to the Constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women and to review the existing legislations and suggest amendments, wherever necessary. The NCW is empowered to monitor the proper implementation of all the legislations made to protect the rights of women so as to enable them to achieve equality in all spheres of life and equal participation in the development of the nation.

## **13. International cooperation**

### **13.1 Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

India signed the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 30th July 1980 and ratified it on 9th July 1993 with one reservation and two declaratory statements. The convention obligates the State parties to undertake appropriate legislative and other measures to eliminate discrimination against women and for guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom on the basis of equality with men.

### 13.2 Beijing Platform for Action

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995 was a landmark event that set the pace for women's empowerment when a Declaration and Platform for Action (BFPA) were adopted. India adopted both without any reservations and identified 12 critical areas of concerns which include Poverty, Education & Training, Health, Violence Against Women, Women in Armed Conflict, Economy, Power & Decision Making, Institutional Mechanism for advancement of Women, Media, Environment, Human Rights of women and girl child.

### 13.3 India-US Women's Empowerment Dialogue (WED)

Hon'ble MOS (IC), MWCD participated in the India-US Strategic Dialogue, which was chaired by Secretary of State, USA, Ms. Hillary Clinton and Co-chaired by Honourable Minister of External Affairs, Shri S.M. Krishna, held in Washington DC, USA from 11th – 14th June, 2012.

Women representative from India attended the Training of Women Leaders at Asian University for Women in Bangladesh under the Indo-US Strategic Dialogue held on 8th – 20th September, 2012 in Bangladesh.

### 14. Conclusion

The women play a strategic role in the society and in the economy. The status of women in India is not even in all the times. In ancient period they enjoyed equal status with men, in the medieval period, the position of Indian women deteriorated. During British rule and after independence many efforts are being made for improving the status of women in India. The government of India, by passing timely and essential Acts and implementing rules and regulations trying to empower and strengthen the women. No doubt the government of India has many weapons to fight for women empowerment, the prompt and strict implementation is quite essential. Unless the Acts, Policies, Rules, Regulations, etc, are strictly implemented the idea of women empowerment remains unachieved. Hence the efforts of the government are still inadequate and the process of empowering women in India is long way to go.

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