

Women Empowerment and Government Schemes in India

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Abstract

Women empowerment has emerged as a central concern in India's development discourse, recognizing women as key agents of social, economic, and political transformation. The Government of India has introduced a wide range of schemes and policy initiatives aimed at improving women's access to education, healthcare, employment, financial inclusion, safety, and decision-making power. Major initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Jan Dhan Yojana, Self-Help Group (SHG) movement, Mission Shakti, and Stand-Up India have sought to address structural inequalities and promote inclusive growth. Despite notable progress, challenges such as patriarchal norms, limited awareness, digital divide, and uneven implementation continue to constrain outcomes, particularly for women from rural, marginalized, and economically weaker sections. This study examines the role of government schemes in advancing women empowerment in India, evaluates their achievements and limitations, and highlights the need for convergence, community participation, and gender-responsive governance to ensure sustainable empowerment and inclusive national development.

Keywords- *Women Empowerment; Government Schemes; Gender Equality; Social Inclusion; Economic Empowerment; Education; Health; Self-Help Groups; Policy Interventions; India*

Introduction

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women are an integral part of every economy. All-round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence and political participation.

Women empowerment enables autonomy and control over their lives. The empowered women become agents of their own development, able to exercise choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge their subordinate position in the society. Women particularly in rural areas have proportionately least possessions, skills, education, social status, leadership qualities and capabilities for mobilization, which determines the degree of decision making and power, and as a result, their dependence on men increases. They have been confined to the four walls of the household, overburdened with domestic works and controlled of their mobility and personal freedoms by the men of the household since time immemorial. So, they have lagged behind in the fields of education, skill development, employment and as a result, their work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The empowerment of women include creating awareness and consciousness about situations of women, discrimination of women, rights of women, opportunities to the women and importance of gender equality, organizing a group collectively, group identity and group pressure; capacity building and skill development, ability to plan, to decide, to organize, ability to manage, ability to carry out activities, ability to deal with people and institutions in the world around them; participation in

decision making at home, in the community and in the society, and access and control over resources, over means of productivity and over distribution. Empowerment is the process of changing power relations in favour of those at the lower levels of a hierarchy. Empowerment of women implies process by which women's power of self-realization is promoted and reinforced. They develop the capacity for self-reliance out crossing the relationship subordination on account of gender, social and economic status and the role in the family and society. It encompasses the ability to make choices, control resources and enjoy participatory relationship within family and community. They should also be made partners in development and development ultimately becomes a process of empowerment. This ensures their full participation in every aspect of social and national development. This participation is necessary to increase the productivity level of women. Thus, women's empowerment would enlarge the choices and productivity levels of individual women and the collective contribution of women groups. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment.
2. To study the Government Schemes for Women Empowerment.
3. To assess the causes and Awareness of Women Empowerment in India.
4. To utilize the Govt. schemes properly for the benefit of Women Empowerment.
5. To understand the gender discrimination among society.
6. To provide useful suggestions for the development of social balance.

Research methodology

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyse the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study. Present Situation of Women in India, being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Not only are they marginal as public figures average Indian women can hardly take decisions at home or outside. The literacy rate and sex ratio in India has always been matter of concern because in both the cases our women population is behind the race with respect to male population.

Need of Women Empowerment

The status of women in India particularly in rural areas needs to address the issue of empowering women. About 66% of the female population in rural area is unutilized. This is mainly due to existing social customs. In agriculture and Animal care the women contribute 90% of the total workforce. Women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly 2/3 of its work hours, receive 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th the world property. In the past "Vedas Purana" of Indian culture, women were being worshiped such as LAXMI MAA, goddess of wealth; SARSWATI MAA, for wisdom; DURGA MAA for power. Among the world's 900 million illiterate people, 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. 933, only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% in National Cabinet are held by women. The existing studies show that the women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to same class. They constitute less than 1/7th of the administrators and managers in developing countries.

Women Government Schemes for Empowerment

Government of India implemented various poverty alleviation and rural development programmes. These programmes have special components for women empowerment. At present, the Government of India has over 37 schemes for women operated by different departments and ministries. The implementation of these programmes/schemes is monitored specifically with reference to coverage of women. Some of these are as follows: -

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

2. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
3. (Aajeevika) and the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY).
4. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
5. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
6. NGO's Credit Schemes.
7. Crèches/Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
8. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
9. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
10. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
11. Swalamban.
12. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).
13. Integrated Chld Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
14. Swadhar.
15. Swayasjdhya.
16. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes
17. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
18. Hostels for working women.
19. Ujjawala (2007).
20. Working Women's Forum
21. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
23. Swa Shakti Group.
24. Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
25. Short Stay Homes.
26. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
27. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 199517.
28. Dhanalakshmi (2008).
29. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
30. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
31. SBI's Sree Shakti Scheme.
32. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 199517.
33. Indira Mahila Kendra.
34. Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM).
35. Indira Priyadarshini Yojana.
36. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY).
37. Beti padao beti bachao yojana.

Causes of Women Empowerment

Government of India took so many initiatives to empower the women in India. But women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need an equal economic power to stand side by side to the men. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. On the other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. Thus, increasing education among women is very important in empowering them. A big proportion of women in rural India are physically so weak who work more than the

food they consume. This discrimination needs to be addressed for the empowerment of weaker section of the society to make them powerful and respectful. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate appropriate policies that aim at reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, prevention, and elimination of violence against women and creating the basic assets to empower the women population of the nation.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Society must provide equal opportunity to both of the sexes for the upliftment of society and for the well-being of society as a whole. Women represent half the world's population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men have, entire society will be destined to perform below their true potentials.

The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal because empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which they can get the proper benefit from the schemes made by Government for the women development. There should be 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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