

Evaluating the Impact of Government Schemes and Legislative Frameworks on Women's Empowerment in India

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Abstract

Women play a dominant role and are of paramount importance in the family, community and nation. Women empowerment refers to the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, and economic strength of women. It develops them to become more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and can make their decisions in matters that affect them. Women empowerment has become one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century however in practice; it remains an illusion of reality. Today women are the victims of gender discrimination and all forms of violence. Empowerment of women is a vital tool to raise awareness, build self-confidence, expansion of choices, and increase access to and control over resources and actions to face challenges of gender discrimination and inequality. The objective of this paper is to examine various schemes and laws for women empowerment implemented in India which promote social & economic empowerment of women and ensure the care, development and protection of women.

Key Words: Women, Empowerment, Schemes, Education, Laws

Introduction

“Each time a woman stands for herself, she stands for all women.”

-Maya Angelou

Empowerment focuses on empowering every woman in the country to become self-sufficient in all sectors of society, to be aware of their rights, and to be physically secure. Women play a dominant role and are of paramount importance in the family, community and nation. Women empowerment has become one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century however in practice; it remains an illusion of reality. Today women are the victims of gender discrimination and all forms of violence. For sustainable and equitable development of the country, it is crucial to empower, protect and ensure the wholesome development of

women. Women's empowerment has arisen as a prominent concern on the global growth agenda in recent decades (Malhotra et al.2002). Furthermore, the commitment to enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment was emphasized in the Third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) and the World Bank's Global Development Report 2012 as significant factors in improving health and achieving development goals (UN General Assembly, 2000; Kabeer, 2005a).

Empowerment of women is a vital tool to raise awareness, build self-confidence, expansion of choices, and increase access to and control over resources and actions to face challenges of gender discrimination and inequality. Women particularly in rural areas have the least possessions, skills, education, social status, leadership qualities and capabilities for mobilization, which determine the degree of decision-making power, and as a result, their dependence on men increases. They have been confined to the four walls of the household, overburdened with domestic work and controlled in terms of their mobility and personal freedoms by the men of the household since time immemorial. So they have lagged in the fields of education, skill development, and employment and as a result, their work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in society (Lekhika, 2022)

For India to develop sustainably, as well as to bring about revolutionary economic and social reforms, it is essential to empower and safeguard women, to ensure their healthy development in a safe and secure environment, as they constitute half of India's population as per the 2011 census. The Government of India has been making various efforts to empower women. The Ministry of Women and Child Development works to promote robust, independent women by giving them an environment which is accessible, affordable, reliable and devoid of all types of abuse and discrimination. Through its various missions, the Ministry of Women and Child Development emphasizes achieving this objective by promoting social & economic empowerment of women and ensuring the care, development and protection of women. The year 2001 was declared as the year of women's empowerment for enhancing their status. To achieve the goal, the government introduced different programmes, identified strategies, established different institutions and made various legal provisions. Despite all these efforts and actions, women in India still lag behind the men.

Objective of the Study

1. To examine various schemes and laws for women empowerment implemented in India.
2. Assessing the effectiveness of the schemes in improving women's socio-economic status.

Methodology and Sources of Data

This paper highlights women empowerment schemes and laws in India. The Methodology of this paper is descriptive and required data are collected from different secondary sources like books, research articles and websites.

Schemes and Programmes to Empower Women

Various schemes and programmes were implemented by the Government, for effective implementation of these schemes the Ministry of Women and Child Development classified all major schemes under 3 umbrella schemes. All 3 Missions will be implemented during the 15th Finance Commission period 2021-22 to 2025-26. The schemes are:-**Mission Poshan 2.0, Mission Vatsalya and Mission Shakti.**

Women and men are granted equal rights in terms of freedom and opportunity by the Constitution. A life-cycle continuum approach is being used to create an ecosystem that addresses inherent biases and role plays, protects and upholds the rights and dignity of women, gives them the necessary skill sets, and gives them the confidence to forge their paths to enable them to be the authors of their destiny. Women's safety, security, and dignity are of utmost significance to the government. For women and girls to participate in India's social, economic, and political growth, it is necessary to have an inclusive society where they have equal access to resources and opportunities. The economic, environmental, and social transformations necessary for sustainable development are mostly driven by women. It is imperative and required to continue current programmes with the appropriate modifications to attain this goal, which can be done through Mission Shakti. Mission Shakti aims to ensure a lifecycle support system for women through integrated care, safety, protection, rehabilitation and empowerment.

The objective of the scheme

- ✚ To address gaps in State action for women and children
- ✚ To promote inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral convergence to create gender-equitable and child-centred legislation, policies and programmes

- ✚ Provide immediate and comprehensive continuum of care, support and assistance to women affected by violence and those who are in distress.
- ✚ To give protection and rehabilitation to women who are the victims of violence and crime.
- ✚ To improve accessibility to various government services available for women.
- ✚ Creating awareness about Government schemes and programmes as well as providing legal provisions to fight social evils like dowry, domestic violence, and sexual harassment at the workplace and promote gender equality.

Aims of the scheme

- ✚ To create an inclusive society in the country where women and girls have equal access to resources and opportunities which will in turn help in the country's social, economic and political development.
- ✚ It will be run in a mission mode and will adopt a life cycle continuum approach.
- ✚ Provides a strong architecture for convergence, cooperation, and synergy
- ✚ Budget allocation: Rs 3,184 crore in 2022-23

Mission Shakti has two sub-schemes '**Sambal**' and '**Samarthya**'.

The "**Sambal**" sub-scheme is for the safety and security of women.

Initiatives under Sambal

- ✚ **One Stop Centre Scheme:** It provides necessary support and assistance to women affected by violence in private and public places, within the family, community and at the workplace. The Ministry approved the Scheme for setting up a 'One Stop Centre' to support women affected by violence on 4th March 2015. The scheme aims to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/case management, psychosocial counselling, and temporary support services to women affected by violence. The OSC will be 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 - to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof; to facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counselling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.

- ✚ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** ‘Save girl child, educate girl child’ is a Central Government Sponsored Scheme. The goal is to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for women. It also aims to celebrate the Girl Child & Enable her Education. The Scheme was launched on 22nd January 2015 to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of girls and women over a life cycle continuum. The objectives of the scheme are, to prevent gender-biased sex selective elimination, to ensure survival and protection of the girl child and to provide education and participation of the girl child.
- ✚ **Women Helpline Scheme:** This was launched on 6th August 2017 by the Modi Government. The objectives of this scheme are: to provide 24-hour emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence including sexual offences and harassment both in the public and private sphere, and to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence.
- ✚ **Central Victim Compensation Fund:** The Central Victim Compensation Fund has been created under Nirbhaya, which is a corpus fund to support States/UTs for their Victim Compensation Scheme. This ensures adequate and timely support for women survivors of crime and violence.
- ✚ Nari Adalats a new component has been added to the scheme wherein faster alternative dispute resolution is provided and gender justice is ensured.

The “**Samarthya**” sub-scheme is for the empowerment of women.

Initiatives under Samarthya

- **Swadhar Greh** to provide relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress.
- **Ujjawala Scheme** helps in preventing women and children trafficking. The objective is to prevent, rescue, rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of trafficking.
- **Working Women Hostels** for ensuring safe accommodation for women working away from their place of residence.
- **National Creche Scheme** to provide daycare facilities to children of the age group of 6 months to 6 years of working women who are employed.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** provides cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mothers under the umbrella of Integrated Child Development Services ICDS have been included in Samarthya.

- **Gender Budgeting** is a tool for mainstreaming gender perspectives at various stages of planning, budgeting, implementation, impact assessment and revisiting of policy/programme objectives and allocations.
- **Stree Shakti Package for Women Entrepreneurs:** The Scheme promoted by the State Bank of India (SBI) is the Shakti Package for Women Entrepreneurs. Businesses operated by women entrepreneurs are eligible to receive loans under the Stree Shakti Package. To identify "Women Entrepreneurs" businesses, the definition recommended by the MSME Department of India will be applicable. As per definition, a Women Entrepreneur business is - A small scale industrial unit/industry related service or business enterprise managed by one or more women entrepreneurs in proprietary concerns or in which she/they individually or jointly have a share capital of not less than 51% as partners /shareholders/Directors of Private Limited Company/Members of Co-operative Society. Thus, women entrepreneurs businesses in retail trade, manufacturing or services are eligible for the scheme. Also, Women professionals like Doctors, Beauticians, Architects and Chartered Accountants can avail of loans under the Stree Shakti package.
- **Mahila E-Haat:** The Ministry of Women & Child Development launched Mahila E-Haat a bilingual portal on 7th March 2016. This is a unique direct online marketing platform leveraging technology to support women entrepreneurs/SHGs/ NGOs for showcasing the products/services which are made/manufactured/ undertaken by them. It will help women to make financial and economic choices which will enable them to be a part of 'Make in India' and 'Stand Up India' initiatives. It is an initiative for meeting the aspirations and needs of women. This was done keeping in mind that digital media is a critical component for business efficiency and thus it should be made available to the majority of Indian women entrepreneurs. Since its launch over 17 lakh visitors/hits have been received by the Mahila-E-Haat Portal. Women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs from all states are showcasing products/services across 18 categories viz., Clothing (Men, Women & Children), Bags, Fashion Accessories/Jewellery, Decorative and gift items, Home Décor, Carpets / Rugs, Baskets, Linen/ Cushion Covers, Boxes, Pottery, Grocery & Staples / Organic, Natural Products, Industrial Products, Educational Aids and Miscellaneous.

- **Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK):** To empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment in which they realize their full potential. It will provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for availing their entitlements also empowering them through training and capacity building.

Apart from the above schemes, the government of India have set various other plans like the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) which aims to address the situation of poor women in remote areas who are not able to move out of their native for skill training. This would help women to be self-employed.

Laws enacted for the Empowerment of women

Some specific laws which were enacted by the Parliament to fulfil the Constitutional obligation of women's empowerment are,

- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.
- Domestic Violence Act 2005
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- The Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.

These laws not only provide specific legal rights to women but also give them a sense of security and empowerment.

International Conventions of India for Empowerment of Women

India is a part of various International conventions and treaties which are committed to secure equal rights of women.

- One of the most important among them is the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by India in 1993. It has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol of the CEDAW and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

- Other important International instruments for Women Empowerment are The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action”.
- Despite such efforts, ranking on global surveys of gender equality has not improved over the years. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 140th among 156 countries (World Economic Forum, 2021). Given the low ranking on the gender gap, India has to work towards political empowerment which is relatively low as well as economic empowerment which has widened since 2006 (Kapur and Narayan 2020). The law enforcement system and the legal process have been seen falling short in terms of protecting women and girls because of corruption, lack of transparency and failure of the judiciary to deliver quick justice. A more inclusive and extensive approach is necessary to ensure the empowerment of women through level playing fields in the case of education, employment, health care, economic and political representation.

Conclusion

Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century not only at the national level but also at the international level. Various national and International commitments, laws and policies withstanding women's situation on the ground have still not improved satisfactorily. Varied problems related to women are still subsisting; female infanticide is growing, dowry is still prevalent, domestic violence against women is practised; sexual harassment at the workplace and other heinous sex crimes against women are on the rise. Sustainable and equitable development is possible only when the Empowerment and Protection of women are given priority, as women constitute half of India's population. To empower women safe and secure environment that is accessible, dependable, and free from all sorts of prejudice should be created. Though, the economic and social condition of women has improved in a significant way the change is especially visible only in urban areas; the situation is not much improved in semi-urban areas and villages. Since majority of the women live in rural areas and the disparity is due to a lack of education and job opportunities and the negative mindset of the society which does not approve of education for girl children. When women are empowered, educated and facilitated good

health the entire family will be empowered, educated and will lead a secure and healthy life. Society must take the initiative to create an environment in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities in decision-making and participating in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. Overall significant strides have been made through various schemes and laws, continuous efforts are needed to address the underlying societal barriers and ensure that women can fully leverage these initiatives for their empowerment and the broader development of the nation.

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